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MY QUEEN

UNDER LOCK AND KEY
OR MARION MARLOWE'S LAST RÔLE
BY GRACE SHIRLEY

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MY QUEEN
A WEEKLY JOURNAL FOR YOUNG WOMEN

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UNDER LOCK AND KEY;

OR,

Marion Marlowe's Last Role.

By GRACE SHIRLEY.

CHAPTER I.

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

It was eleven o'clock and the theatres were just pouring their streams of human beings into the main thoroughfares of the city when Richard Carson, attorney-at-law, entered one of the most popular restaurants and seated himself at a table.

Mr. Carson had been at his office the entire evening, a thing which he would never have done had he not been very anxious over business matters, and, as he seated himself, he leaned his head wearily upon one hand and only aroused himself when the waiter came for his order.

"This won't do," he muttered, under his breath, as the man hurried away, "I must not give up. I must fight it out. I'll feel better, no doubt, when I have had a cup of coffee."

He leaned back in his chair, and, as he did so, a curtain at his side fluttered. A window was open and the light breeze had touched the filmy drapery and before it fell back into place he caught a glimpse of two people just the other side of the false partition.

A moment later a sweet voice reached his ears, and the words, although spoken softly, sent a thrill of horror through his whole being.

"Is your mother better, Reginald?" asked the musical voice, "and when do you think I can see her, dearest?"

The reply came quickly in a well-known voice, and Richard Carson leaned more heavily upon the table and his breath came faster.

"She will see you in a day or two, Marion, darling! She is quite ill now, but I am sure she will be better soon, and then it is her wish to have a little talk with you."

"Oh, Reginald! Do you think she will give her consent?" was the young girl's quick answer.

The lawyer stopped breathing almost, as he listened eagerly for the reply, and there

was a flash in his sunken eyes that spoke of intense emotion.

"Of course she will consent, dearest! Why, she cannot help loving my sweetheart!" was the prompt answer. "In fact, Marion, my mother more than half loves you already, but you see, it is this way—she adored my father and, now that he is dead, she feels that she must carry out his wishes, one of which you know, so I need not repeat it."

There was a moment's silence and the rattle of dishes; then, as the waiters at both tables moved swiftly away, the young couple resumed their low conversation.

"I don't blame her, Reginald," said the young girl; "if you should die, I should feel exactly the same way. No matter how foolish your wishes might be, I should be anxious to execute them."

"You and mother are so much alike, Marion," answered her lover, tenderly. "The two best women in the world! You must love each other, Marion!"

There was another clatter of dishes and Richard Carson raised his cup of coffee to his lips, but his hands trembled so badly that he set it down untasted. The young couple on the other side of the draped partition did not dream of his presence, and the next moment, as he had heard his own name, he bent forward feverishly.

"Will that lawyer, Mr. Carson, try to influence her?" asked the young girl, quietly. "You know, I heard him trying to influence you that day at your office."

There was a low exclamation which spoke plainly of disgust, and then the eavesdropper made good the adage of hearing no good of himself, for Reginald Brookes was angry and spoke with unusual severity.

"Carson is a fool!" he said, quickly. "He can't see the length of his nose. He knew my father and he ought to know me! The idea of his thinking that the loss of a hundred thousand would stop me from marrying the woman I love! Well, I guess not! Not so long as I have two hands with which to support her!"

"You are so brave, darling!" came the silvery voice. "Oh, I don't believe she will ask me to give you up when I tell her how dearly I love you, Reginald!"

There was another brief pause and then the young girl spoke in a more serious voice, while her lover was silent.

"I do miss Mrs. Burnside and Lena so," she said, sadly. "They have gone to Boston for a two weeks' visit, and I feel as lonesome at the hotel as though I were in a wilderness. I'd go up and stay with Dollie, only I am so worried, dear. I will not feel like myself until I have seen your mother."

"You do look feverish, sweetheart, and you are not eating," was the quick answer. "Oh, Marion, can't you trust me when I assure you that all will be well? That you will be my precious wife in another month and that nothing on earth can come between us!"

Richard Carson had heard enough, and, after paying his bill hurriedly, he hastened from the restaurant.

The night was dark and mild, and, as he walked slowly, his brain was seething with a tumult of perplexing thoughts, and his face seemed to steadily grow paler and paler.

Suddenly he came face to face with a familiar figure. He half stopped, then moved on, then turned and spoke to the man who was leaning against a lamppost in a careless attitude.

"Steve Blakely, is it you?" he asked, in a low tone. "You have forgotten me, perhaps—I am Richard Carson."

The man pulled his hand out of his pocket and offered it familiarly.

"No, I haven't forgotten you, but I waited for you to speak," he said, coolly. "I'm a little bashful, you know, especially with my superiors."

He laughed coarsely as he spoke, but the lawyer did not notice it. He had been doing some hard thinking in the space of a minute.

"I did you a favor once," he went on, directly. "Will you do me one now, if you can, Blakely?"

The fellow joined him as he spoke and the two turned a corner into a quieter street and walked a few steps before there was any reply to his question.

"What sort of a favor?" asked Blakely, cautiously.

"The sort you are accustomed to! I will pay you well!" was the prompt answer. "I want you to do a dirty job, and, further, I want you to plan it—I am totally incapable."

"I'm not so sure," was the answer, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You lawyers are pretty clever when you are cornered, Carson, but, if your figure is big enough, I'll tackle the job. Let's go down to your office and talk it over."

An hour later the two were still sitting in earnest conversation. Then Steve Blakely rose slowly from his seat by the lawyer's desk and moved toward the door.

"The plan will work all right, trust me for that," he was saying, in a low tone. "I know the sanitarium and I know one of the doctors. Further, the trick has been played before, and no one was any the wiser. This girl has no relatives who will interfere, you say, so the only one we have to fool is her lover, the doctor."

"And you'll do it all, Blakely? You'll get the papers and everything?" asked the lawyer, eagerly.

"I'll do it, but it may not be done in a minute. It's a ticklish job, Carson, and it must be done cleverly. I wouldn't undertake it if I didn't need the money."

"Nor I," was the answer, in a sepulchral tone; "but, if he marries that girl, I am a beggar, Blakely. There is nothing between me and starvation but my income as executor."

The old lawyer sighed as the door closed softly. He had done a night's work that was positively fiendish, but he could not retreat now, for his secret had been shared. Steve Blakely, a professional crook, was in possession of it.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOT.

Exactly a week later, at the same hour, Richard Carson was again seated in his office and was making a pretense of looking over some musty papers. Suddenly there was a gentle tap upon the ground glass door just behind him, and, with a nervous start, he arose and admitted a man whose appearance and manner were decidedly mysterious.

"Well!"

The lawyer uttered the exclamation as he closed and bolted the door, but the newcomer did not deign to answer until he had divested himself of a broad-brimmed felt hat, a set of false whiskers and a pair of pale blue eye-glasses.

Then he removed a long, plaid mackintosh, shaking some raindrops from it as he did so and throwing it on a chair, sat down upon another and leaned back comfortably.

"There! Thank Heaven, I am myself once more!" he muttered, under his breath. "That's the only objection I have to this job, Carson—I hate to feel as if I was a dummy for the display of assorted garments."

The lawyer bit his lips at the familiarity of the man, but he was in no position to be exacting at that moment.

"Did you get the papers?" he asked, in a low tone. "You've kept me waiting long enough; you ought to have them."

"And I was kept waiting, also," was the indifferent answer. "I called at the Brookes mansion first, as you directed, and spent fifteen minutes finding out that Mrs. Brookes was still very ill and that her son was in attendance at her bedside. Then I hunted up Peters, the chap that was to do the writing on the papers, and a deuce of a time I had finding him, too. It took an hour and a half exactly, to the minute."

"And the girl, Marion Marlowe—what of her?" broke in the lawyer, excitedly. "Did you see the nurse? Talk fast, man, I am in a hurry!"

Mr. Carson rose as he spoke, and stood beside his companion. He was as pale as death, and his lips twitched constantly.

"I'll tell my news in my own time, Carson," said the fellow, doggedly. "You're not paying me so much that you can afford to rush me. Just add another fifty and maybe I'll talk faster."

Lawyer Carson moved away a step and began pacing the office floor. He did not deign to answer the insolence of the fellow.

"Miss Marlowe is better, but still ailing," went on the cautious voice, "and the nurse she hired just in the nick of time has proved herself a treasure. Why, a hungry fish could not have snapped at my bait any quicker than she did! If we had chosen her ourselves, we couldn't have done better! But to go on with my story—the two ladies have had a confab and they are both laid up from nervousness or something. Dr. Brookes is tied hand and foot at his mother's bedside, while Miss Marlowe is at a hotel almost without a friend. Oh, it's a sure thing, Carson, the way could not be easier!"

There was a silence for a moment and then the newcomer drew some papers from his pocket and fingered them carefully.

Mr. Carson came to a sudden halt and extended his hand in an eager manner.

"So you did get them, after all? Who signed them?" he asked, sharply.

The fellow handed him the papers and watched him closely as he turned them over. There was an exclamation of astonishment as Mr. Carson's eyes rested upon the signatures.

"By all the powers, Blakely, how did you, do it?" he asked, sharply.

"That nurse, Miss Kearney, helped with a suggestion or two," was the drawling answer. "I tell you, Carson, that woman is a corker! She isn't averse to earning your five hundred. The patient will be entered as Miss Cornelia Gordon. I've got it down on the papers, and there's her father's name and two doctors'. They won't ask any questions when you show them that document, Carson."

"Did you apply for the admission?" asked the lawyer, quickly.

"Sure, or Peters did, and stated the case in detail. I've got Dr. Lee's answer here. He says he'll make room for her."

"For how much?"

"Two hundred a month! Cheap enough!" was the answer.

As Mr. Carson folded the papers carefully, his pale cheeks flushed and his thin hands trembled so that he could hardly control them. "Now all you have to do is to get her to the asylum," went on the indifferent voice again. "And, if you take my advice, you'll lose no time about it. The girl has no relative in this State except a twin sister, who lives in Harlem, and who is as unsophisticated as a child, and with Dr. Brookes dancing attendance on his mother, there's no one to interfere. A carriage ride with the nurse will fix it nicely. Of course, she'll make the rest of the arrangements at the sanitarium."

There was not a ray of interest as he made the suggestion, for Stephen Blakely was merely doing his part of the present undertaking.

Mr. Carson nodded his head. He was too nervous to trust his voice. After glancing again at the two signatures he put the papers in a large, plain envelope and sealed it carefully.

"Shall I deliver that?" asked Steve Blakely, as he started to resume his disguise.

There was a hoarse "Yes" from Mr. Carson, and then the rustle of greenbacks could be heard distinctly in the dingy office.

Steve Blakely took the roll that was handed him and counted it leisurely. When the count was over he put it in his pocket, then adjusted the eye-glasses and beard and left the office silently; there was not even a good-night exchanged between the two conspirators.

The moment he was gone Richard Carson bolted the door behind him, then he dropped into his chair, shaking like one with the palsy.

"It had to be done!" he whispered, after a minute.

"Ruin, nothing but ruin staring me in the face! To loose the Brookes estate would mean my undoing, and I am too old, too old to become a beggar!"

He leaned his head upon his desk and the tears trickled through his lashes; then, recovering himself with a great effort, he rose to leave the office.

"He shall not marry her!" he muttered, as he hurried into his coat. "Reginald Brookes shall not disobey his father's will and so cheat me out of my income as executor of the estate! I have lost everything else! I must not lose that! I will not lose it if this ruse can save it!"

The office door closed behind him as he whispered the last words, and then Richard Carson drew himself up with a mighty effort. He had stooped to a deed which would mean imprisonment were it to be revealed, but, should it succeed, he would live in affluence awhile longer, perhaps until his days, which were well on to three score and ten, should be ended.

The will of Daniel Brookes was a peculiar instrument, for so long as Reginald obeyed his father's wishes, he, Richard Carson, remained executor of the entire estate in trust for Mrs. Brookes and the doctor, and the income was divided equally between them, but, should Reginald marry beneath his station in life or contrary to the known wishes of his father, every penny of the enormous fortune would be turned over to Mrs. Brookes, and the lady was to act her own pleasure with it. That she disliked him thoroughly the lawyer knew—hence, with Reginald's marriage to Marion, his last hope vanished. It was for him to act at once if he would save his position.

Now all depended upon his cleverness and the silence of his confederate. It was no wonder he had aged perceptibly even in those last few days.

But his man, Steve Blakely, was not repining at his lot.

As he fingered the papers he chuckled softly:

"It's the same old game the world over. Doctors, lawyers, ministers—they are all alike! All out for the stuff, and not stopping at anything. Thank my lucky star, I know them all! Steve Blakely has his pals in every class in society!"

CHAPTER III.

THE INCARCERATION.

"Miss Thompson!"

"Well?"

"Have you a vacant room in the ward?"

"Not now, but I will have after bedtime, Mrs. Mason. Mollie is going up to number eight. Have you a new patient for me?"

Mrs. Mason, the supervisor of the "Home Rest Sanitarium," came up close to the attendant before she answered.

"I think I shall have, Miss Thompson, but not until late," she said, in a low voice. "Dr. Lee expects an arrival some time between now and midnight. I thought it well to be prepared for her."

"She must be pretty bad, if this is her destination!" remarked the attendant, grimly. "What is the matter with the reception ward? Is it too crowded already?"

Mrs. Mason did not reply. It was not her habit to answer many questions. Her duty was to obey orders from her superiors and see that her own were carried out. She was half way across the long hall before the attendant realized it.

"She is a dumb one," remarked Miss Thompson to her roommate, Miss Taylor, as she joined her a minute later. "You couldn't get a bit of information out of Mason with a lemon squeezer! She is just the woman for a supervisor in a lunatic asylum!"

"Hush! For Heaven's sake, hush! Who dares to call this a lunatic asylum?" said Miss Taylor, laughing.

"Well, I do for one," was Miss Thompson's answer, "and, what is more, of all the hopeless infernos that I ever read about, this 'Home Rest Sanitarium' takes the medal, Edith Taylor! Why, I would as soon be a resident of the old original bottomless pit before it became reconstructed into Hades and Gehenna and all those nice sounding places as to spend one day in the wards of this place, if it wasn't that I knew I was at liberty to leave any minute."

"Pshaw! You may never be allowed to exercise that liberty!" laughed Miss Taylor again, "especially if you will be so frank in your statements, Mary. Why, just let Dr. Lee or one of his assistants hear but a whisper of your honest sentiments, my dear, and —presto! change—out you would go in a jiffy! And with your name on the 'blacklist' for the benefit of all such kindred 'sanitariums,' and, as like as not, minus your last month's salary."

"Thank goodness, I'll take my tongue with me when I go!" snapped Miss Thompson, quickly. "And say, won't I do a bit of talking, Edith! I'll preach upon the housetops what I have seen in this cellar,

for that is all ward three is, if I am any judge of locations!"

She was standing upon a wooden bench as she spoke, peering through a closely-grated window, and, a moment later, she cried out sharply:

"Miss Day, of number seven, is having trouble with one of the patients! One of us had better go! Which shall it be, Edith?"

Miss Taylor had already opened the outer door with a heavy key, and, in a second, she had darted out into an asphalt courtyard which contained no less than twenty extraordinary looking human beings. These creatures were women who were mentally unbalanced, and they were the very worst specimens that the institution could muster.

In the midst of them was a frail attendant who was struggling with a creature nearly twice her size and who was in danger of being seriously hurt before Miss Taylor could reach her.

Miss Thompson watched the struggle without a ray of interest. She was accustomed to such sights, so they did not disturb her. When the refractory patient had been marched across the courtyard and returned to her ward for solitary confinement for a time, Miss Taylor came back, straightening out her badly rumpled apron.

"They have a few fiends up on number seven, it seems," she said, quietly.

"I was beginning to think we had them all, but Lib Goode is a terror from Terrorville, Mary."

"They say she was sane when she was brought here," remarked Miss Thompson, indifferently, as she got down off the bench. "I don't know how true it is, but I would not dispute it. In my opinion, Dr. Lee is capable of anything. He'd commit any old sin if he saw sufficient money in it!"

"Oh, Mary, do be careful!" warned Miss Taylor, again. "Suppose Mrs. Mason should hear you, or that old cat, the matron! Really I don't want the bother of breaking in a new roommate just now. I do wish, for my sake, you would be a little careful."

She laughed as she spoke, but her face was serious. It was not often she was suited with a roommate, and she did like Miss Thompson.

A key clicked in a lock and the ward door was thrown open.

"Where's the graduate from ward three?" called out another attendant. "Mrs. Mason said I was to come and get her!"

Miss Thompson stepped to the outer door and opened it, and then scanned the occupants of the yard.

"Come here, Mollie!" she called, in a pleasant tone; then, as a young girl rose slowly from a bench and started toward her, she turned her head and gave vent to another outburst of opinion.

"She was as pretty as a picture when she came here, girls. She had had brain fever or something, and her friends put her in here. Since she lost her reckoning completely, they have forgotten she is on earth, but they say Lee can render any kind of an old bill, and they'll pay it promptly. They don't want Mollie to appear to them suddenly, for they are society people."

The young girl had entered the hall and stood gazing about stupidly. She was a mild-looking patient and entirely tractable.

"I hate to part with her! She's the only decent one we have!" said Miss Taylor, regretfully. "Still, I musn't envy her her opportunity to get upstairs once more. Once down in this dungeon usually means good-by to everything. No one ever gets back above ground. Mollie is the only exception."

"Oh, they consider her dead safe!" said Miss Thompson, sarcastically. "She doesn't know enough to wish to get out, and nobody wants her. They could exhibit her on the front porch with perfect safety."

"It is a great place, this Home Rest Sanitarium," remarked the third attendant, slowly. "Yet I understand, girls, that it has an excellent reputation! Oh, well, Dr. Lee has a smooth tongue, and he has no end of influence. He's a relative of the Governor or the President or somebody!"

"His day will come, in spite of all that!" remarked Miss Thompson, dryly, just as the supper call sounded. "He'll meet his come-up-once some time, as we used to say in

school, and—well, I hope I'll be on hand at the day of reckoning."

There was a quiet laugh, and then the bustle of supper followed.

The patients in ward three were fed like so many cattle, after which they were promptly undressed and hurried into their gloomy sleeping-rooms.

At nine o'clock one light alone burned dimly in the ward, and from each of the rooms came strange, unearthly noises. Here a patient would be singing in a weird, uncanny strain; there, another would be weeping or cursing volubly. Each had given herself up to her individual fancy or delusion, and the place would have sounded like pandemonium to an outsider.

Miss Thompson glanced at the clock in the attendants' bedroom and yawned. It was a quarter of ten. She must sit up fifteen minutes longer.

"I suppose we'll both have to turn out when the new patient comes," she said, disgustedly. "Of course, she'll be excited, and probably the night-watch won't be able to handle her! Hello! There she is now! I'll bet a hatpin!"

She half rose from her chair and listened intently, while Miss Taylor, who was brushing her hair for the night, hastened to braid it firmly.

"The room is ready, and there's a strait-jacket on the first nail in the clothes-room," she began, in a matter-of-fact tone, when another unusual sound echoed through the building.

"I declare, I believe they are actually dragging her!" cried Miss Thompson, quickly. "I can hear a dozen feet, and—yes, I'm sure that is Dr. Lee's voice! Well, she must be a corker, if his joblots is with her!"

The two girls had just time to appear upon the ward when the door flew open. There were at least a half dozen attendants, the supervisor and two doctors; and then their eyes fell upon the face of the expected new patient.

A young girl, beautifully formed, and with a face as perfect as a saint's, was struggling desperately in the hands of two stalwart attendants. As they glanced at each other, and then at her, the great, luminous eyes of the young girl were turned to them beseechingly.

"Do tell me what this outrage means?" she cried, in a ringing voice. "I came in this place for a few minutes' rest, and, by some hideous blunder, I have been detained, and my nurse has left me. Who dares to say that I am insane? I am as sane as you are, and you know it—every one of you! Let me out this minute, if you have any justice in your souls! Oh, Reginald—Bert! Oh, Alma! If you only knew what I am enduring!"

She covered her face with her hands as she said the last words; then, as those about her fell back a little, she withdrew them instantly.

"No, I will not weep!" she said, holding her head proudly. "I have been cruelly wronged; but I will be strong and brave! I demand my liberty of you, Dr. Lee! If you do not give it to me at once, I shall force you to give it!"

As she mentioned his name, the superintendent of the sanitarium stepped forward. He did not look at the patient, but turned at once to the two attendants.

"A very sad case, girls," he said, in his oily tones; "an exceedingly sad case! She is extremely violent. Of course, you will use all necessary precaution, Miss Taylor. The young lady thinks she is being incarcerated unjustly, which is very natural. It is only one of her many hallucinations."

A scornful glance from the excited young girl followed his words; then, once more the great, gray eyes rested upon Miss Thompson.

"Listen!" she cried, sharply. "I have something to say! I am here through some horrible mistake! Oh, ladies, if you have any mercy in your hearts, let me out of this place! I and my lover will reward you handsomely. He is Dr. Reginald Brookes, of New York, and I am Marion Marlowe, an actress! I will tell you my story, and then you must save me!"

CHAPTER IV.

A COMFORTER.

The names had hardly left her lips when the superintendent interrupted her.

"You can tell these young ladies your story to-morrow," he said, quickly; "but you must

retire at once, for you are sadly worn out. In the morning, I am sure you will think of us more kindly."

"Never, Dr. Lee!" exclaimed the musical voice. "I shall always think of you exactly as I do now! You are a base villain! You have some dreadful design upon me! I can see through your smoothness now, when it is too late, too late!"

Once more the ruby lips trembled, and the young girl nearly broke down, but, before she had time to say more, the doctor and his assistants had vanished. A moment later she was seated upon a heavy bench, and strange hands began disrobing her in a determined manner.

Marion shuddered a moment at the indignity, and then sprang to her feet and confronted the group of women; then, with a mighty effort of the will, she controlled the flood of indignation that swept over her.

"Oh, ladies! can't you see that I am sane?" she cried out, sharply. "Can't you see that I am a young woman, exactly like yourselves, except that I have had the misfortune to fall into the hands of fiends?"

The attendants glanced at each other, and then one of them responded, roughly:

"Oh, yes! We see all that! We can see any old thing you have a mind to mention; but the fact is, Miss What's-your-name, we want to go to bed, so you'll have to excuse us for hurrying you a little."

She attempted to remove Marion's waist as she spoke, and, after a gesture of indignation, the young girl submitted.

"We'll talk to you to-morrow, all you want us to," said another nurse, more gently; "and we sympathize with you deeply—of course we do. Poor child, you are frightened, and I don't wonder at it; but there won't any one hurt you if you don't make any trouble."

Marion's cheeks turned pale, and her lips trembled as she listened; then, as the others began removing her garments one by one, she looked at them in helpless terror.

"Hurt me! Who would dare to hurt me?" she asked, in a whisper. "Why, I am a perfectly sane woman, and I have friends, parents and money! Who would dream of hurting me, except that Dr. Lee! Oh, to think of his bringing me into this awful place! It is he, not I, who must be crazy!"

"Same old gag!" whispered an attendant to Miss Taylor, who was standing by idly. "They always think it is every one else who is loony. Now, ten chances to one, she takes us for inmates."

Marion heard her distinctly, but she did not reply. She was trying to think connectedly, if the thing were possible.

"She's a beauty, all right! I'd like her style!" said one of the women, coarsely. "Now, what in the world do you suppose set her off her trolley? A love affair, I'll bet! She looks awful sentimental."

"So she is an actress, is she. I wonder if that is true?" remarked another of the number, as she deliberately ripped off Marion's dainty boots and then held them up for inspection. "She must have money to dress like that! Eight dollars a pair, if they are a cent. Just look at them, girls," she went on, calmly. "Now, I can't understand why Lee puts her down here, if she has money! And she ain't violent a bit; only just a trifle excited."

Marion was growing calmer now, and was studying them intently, and, as some one offered her a coarse cotton night-dress, she took it automatically.

"Do you really think that I am crazy?" she asked, in a pitiful tone. "Oh, do please say no, or it will break my heart! Do please try to see that I am not at all insane! I am doing my best to be calm, even in these awful surroundings."

She spoke so beseechingly that the attendants stared at her for a moment: then Miss Thompson suddenly stepped nearer and scrutinized her face closely.

"We'd all lose our positions if we were to say you were not insane," she said, slowly. "The Home Rest Sanitarium is for people suffering with mental disease, in spite of all that its circulars say; and it is against the law for the superintendent to take in any one who has not been properly committed. Do you happen to know whether any such papers have been made out in your case? Of course, if you are sane, you can answer that question."

There was an incredulous smile upon the

faces of the group as Miss Thompson spoke, but the attendant herself was very grave as she waited for Marion's answer.

The young girl's fair face had flushed a little, and she had locked her fingers together. As she looked into Miss Thompson's eyes, her own grew bright with hopefulness.

"I have been ill at my hotel for several days, and my nurse prevailed upon me to take a drive this afternoon," she began, eagerly. "I did not dream of driving so far; but the air was lovely, and, when we reached this place she persuaded me to come in, as she said it was imperative that I should rest before returning. What they did to me in that parlor I do not know. All I remember is that Dr. Lee treated me kindly, and made me welcome. The next I knew I awoke in a peculiar place. My nurse was gone, and I was surrounded by strange faces. Then they brought me down here, and said I was insane. No; I have neither seen nor heard anything of any papers."

Her story was told simply and with eager truth, yet Miss Thompson alone remained seriously troubled.

"Of course there were papers! She would not be here if there weren't!" spoke up the night-watch, who had entered. "And, what's more, she's likely to develop before morning! Any one would think, Miss Thompson, that you were a greeny at this business. The idea of taking a lunatic's word when she says she isn't crazy."

The words were said so hatefully that Marion turned like a flash.

For an instant she was strongly tempted to fly at the woman.

"Hush! Don't say a word," warned Miss Thompson, quickly, as she put her hand on the young girl's arm. "It will only make matters worse if you show any resentment. I wouldn't blame you myself, if you murdered her this minute; but, of course, if you did, they would swear you were crazy. Take my advice and keep cool, if you can."

Marion turned to the speaker with her heart almost bursting with gratitude. The next moment her courage gave way, and she was sobbing upon the kind attendant's shoulder.

"Oh, to think that only yesterday I was so happy!" she cried. "I am engaged to the noblest man in the world, and now—oh, what have I done to deserve such a fate? I am buried alive in a lunatic asylum!"

"Have courage," whispered Miss Thompson, putting her arm around her. "I will help you if I can, but it will be awful hard work. There must be papers or you would not be here; but I promise that I'll do my best to find out to-morrow."

The other attendants fell back, and, a moment later, they left the ward.

They were all laughing over what they called Miss Thompson's attempt to "coddle" the patient, but it was a relief to know that she was not violent, and that their services were not needed.

"She'll probably break loose before morning," said the night-watch, grimly; "and then, you bet I'll call Thompson to quiet her. She's begun by petting her; she may end by other measures!"

The attendants laughed, but it was a laugh of indifference. There was not one of them but would have been genuinely shocked if they had really believed the new patient was not crazy.

"Must I stay in this awful place all night?" whispered Marion to Miss Thompson, as she stood arrayed in her strange costume; "and, oh, must I sleep in that awful room? Why, it looks like a prison cell, it is so dark and cheerless!"

"It's the best the institution affords," answered Miss Taylor, dryly. "The Home Rest isn't noted for the cheerfulness of its apartments."

"It is horribly damp," said Marion, shuddering. "I have been ill for a week. I would not dare to stay there. Oh, let me out! Pray, let me out! I will pay you well if you will give me my liberty!"

"There! Now, are you satisfied that she is loony?" whispered Miss Taylor. "She's off on a tangent already, talking about money. As like as not, her story is all false from the very beginning."

"I am afraid you will have to sleep in there to-night," said Miss Thompson, more firmly. "It is the only place we have, and we can't let you out. We should lose our positions if we did, and, really, I would not dare to. How

do I know that you could take care of yourself if you had your liberty?"

Marion drew a deep sigh, and the tears rushed to her eyes.

"You are doing all you can for me; I see that," she said, simply; "but, oh, you must help me, or I shall go mad indeed. Promise that you will help me to get away from this place, or notify my friends where those fiends have hidden me."

The attendant had her hand upon the door of the dismal, desolate room, and as she looked into the frightened face she felt a great throb of pity.

"I promise," she said, with a smile. "I will do what I can—that is all I can say. Now good-night, and I hope you will be better in the morning."

Marion could not answer, but she stepped slowly into the room.

The key clicked in the lock with an ominous sound, and as she heard it, the young girl fell like one who had received a blow.

She realized of a sudden that she was helpless—a prisoner in a lunatic asylum.

CHAPTER V.

A LESSON IN DISCIPLINE.

"Where is she, Taylor?"

The attendant from number seven asked the question as she entered ward three early the next morning.

"Do you mean Miss Gordon, the new patient?" asked Miss Taylor, smiling, "the one who says she is an actress, and calls herself Marion Marlowe?"

The attendant nodded her head, and then she, too, smiled broadly. She was quite prepared for what was coming.

"Oh, she did exactly what I expected! She went to pieces about daylight," was the answer. "They moved her to the hospital ward about seven o'clock, and, of course, it is just my luck that Mary should have to go with her. Mrs. Mason chased her over because the hospital is short handed. Well, I hope Mary gets enough of her before she's through. Do you know, she really believes that the girl isn't crazy."

"Bosh! She's as mad as a March hare! Just wait!" was the answer: "but how did she go to pieces, mentally or physically?"

"Both," remarked Miss Taylor, with a shrug of the shoulders. "She kept talking about her lover, Dr. Reginald Brookes, and her friend, Bert Jackson, and a Captain Canfield, and she insisted that they were all rich, and that she was rich, too; and she offered us twenty-five thousand dollars apiece to let her out! What do you think of that, Bessie! An easy way to make money, eh? Poor thing! I'm sorry for her, for she's as pretty as a picture! I hope she'll get well, but I very much doubt it."

"Hello, girls!" called another voice at that minute, and another key clicked in a lock. "Now, what do you suppose has happened? Dr. Lee hasn't been in the wards this morning, and when I saw Fenn he looked glummer than ever."

"Going to cut our wages, perhaps," remarked Miss Thompson, who entered the ward at that moment.

"The addition of another patient to their collection don't seem to have cheered them up much," replied Susie Adams; "but how is she, anyway? You ain't saying a word on the subject, Thompson, and you were the only one of the lot who really believed her story."

She gave Miss Thompson an indifferent glance as she spoke, but the attendant was searching through a drawer for a clean apron at the time, and her answer was delivered in jerky sentences.

"Don't bother about me. What I believe and don't believe don't cut any ice. I'm not staying at the Home Rest because I approve of all its doings. I'm staying here to keep my soul and body together, so I hardly think I shall grow gray-headed over the wrongs of my patients."

"Well, you did look upset last night, all right," was the retort; "but I must go back or bedlam will break loose upstairs. It don't do to stay away from those charming innocents very long! They are liable to eat the gas fixtures and pitch the furniture down the dust shaft."

"How is she?" asked Miss Taylor, as soon as Miss Adams had gone.

Miss Thompson tied her apron and smoothed her hair before replying.

"See here," she said, finally. "I would like to trust you. Will you keep a secret for me, if I tell you one, Edith?"

Miss Taylor looked up quickly, and her lips flew open.

"You still think she is sane. Is that it, Mary?" she asked, quickly.

"I don't think anything about it—I know it," whispered Miss Thompson, softly; "and I'd help her out in a minute if I dared."

Miss Taylor bit her lips and looked thoughtful for a moment.

"It won't do, Mary," she said, finally. "It is an awful risk. Ten to one she has a screw loose somewhere or other, and you might be doing her an awful wrong; further, you'd get on the 'black list,' and be queered forever. It don't do to get too sympathetic, Mary."

Miss Thompson sighed, but she could not answer the argument. There was just a possibility of her being mistaken in regard to her patient's condition.

"Well, she's the sanest crazy woman I ever saw," she said, finally; "and I thank my lucky star that she isn't my sister."

She went back to the hospital ward where Marion was lying, and, as she bent over the sleeping girl the tears shone upon her lashes.

What would she not do if she only knew the truth; but how could she go about it to determine the accuracy of Marion's statements?

A word from another nurse brought her back to her surroundings. She was holding out a morning paper and pointing to a paragraph.

"There! I guess that settles it," she said, in a low tone. "This paper says that Miss Cornelia Gordon, a beautiful New York girl, has just been committed to a neighboring sanitarium, suffering from the hallucination that she is a popular actress and an heiress; and it also says that she has been pestering a rich young society man with her attentions for some time."

Miss Thompson seized the paper and read the account eagerly. It was the first thing that had reconciled her to her new patient's condition. She was satisfied now that her charge was crazy.

"Well, I can't help wishing that she would stay asleep all day," she answered, as she handed back the paper. "I've been in this business for seven years, and this is the first patient that has ever made me feel uncomfortable."

"It's her big, honest eyes and girlish face, I guess," said the other nurse, soberly. "We don't usually see fresh faces here. They are all seamed and furrowed from rum, morphine or some such stuff. She's a perfect little innocent. I feel sorry for her."

She moved away softly, and at that minute Marion opened her eyes. The frantic delirium of a few hours of nervousness had entirely passed away, and as she gazed earnestly at the nurse, she was as rational as ever.

"You were speaking of me—I am sure of it," she said, faintly. "What is it, Miss Thompson? Have you heard from my friends? Has my lover learned at last of this fearful blunder?"

It was hard for the attendant to answer the question, but, now that she felt sure that her charge was deluded, her reply came readily.

"Your lover will come! Be patient, little girl. Try to sleep some more, so that you will be well and strong when he comes for you. Here, take this medicine, my dear; it will make you sleepy."

She leaned over the cot as she spoke, but Marion raised her hand in aversion.

"No, no! I do not want to sleep! Do take it away, please, Miss Thompson! Oh, I must keep wide awake, don't you see that I must? And I must try to think of some way to escape from my prison!"

She attempted to rise as she spoke, but a firm hand held her. Miss Thompson's face had suddenly become so stern that it was almost ugly.

"You must take this medicine, Miss Gordon," she said, firmly. "You are here for treatment, and you must obey orders."

She pressed the spoon to the young girl's lips as she spoke, but in a second Marion dashed it to the floor and then sprang up and confronted her.

"I will not take it!" she cried, in a frenzied voice. "It is some of that stuff that they gave me yesterday! Oh, how can you be so cruel as to ask me to swallow a drug that will steal my senses away? Are you all fiends incarnate, instead of women?"

The words passed her lips like a bugle blast, and she clenched her hands in agony: but it was only for a second that she was master of the situation.

So quickly that she could not guess what was coming, Miss Thompson seized her by both arms. The next moment she was back upon the bed, her wrists bound tightly together, and the nurse was standing over her triumphantly, holding out another spoonful of the medicine.

Like a flash Marion realized exactly what she had done. By that one indignant outbreak she had lessened the chances of her liberty.

With a groan of anguish, she closed her eyes; then, as the spoon touched her lips again, she swallowed its contents obediently.

CHAPTER VI.

A MANIAC'S ACTION.

As Marion closed her eyes for her unnatural sleep, Dr. Lee, the superintendent of the sanitarium, turned the key in his office door and sat down at his desk to examine some papers.

He glanced them over carefully, and then, unlocking the door, tapped a bell, which brought his assistant to him.

"Sit down, Dr. Fenn," he said, in a troubled voice; "there's something that I wish to speak to you about. Here, glance over those papers and tell me what you think of them."

There was a silence for a few minutes as the assistant, a low-browed, swarthy fellow, read the documents eagerly; then, as he folded them, he scowled and expressed a curt opinion.

"Whoever made those out must have been deucedly nervous. He has overlooked no less than three of the legal requirements."

Dr. Lee was fingering a bill as he spoke, and the assistant's sharp eyes were trying to read the denomination.

"It struck me that way," said the superintendent, uneasily; "some one has bungled this matter terribly, Fenn, and it looks suspicious. Now, the question is—do we dare to keep that patient?"

Dr. Fenn had just succeeded in catching a good glimpse of the bill, and his voice took on a sort of snarl as he answered, quickly:

"If the price is big enough to make it an inducement. You could double the price of her board, inasmuch as the commitment is not regular; then, if her friends fail to comply, order them to remove her. That will force them to terms the quickest of anything I can mention."

Dr. Lee was scanning the paper as his assistant spoke, and his finger tip rested lightly upon the name of "Benjamin Gordon," which was affixed as that of the new patient's father.

"An invalid, this paper says, so he cannot come to us. Well, of course, we can go to him, if it is absolutely necessary, but the man must be in his dotage to garble a thing like this. He has actually sent me a bank note instead of a check, a thing unheard of before in my experience. Now, why couldn't he transact business in a businesslike way! And that paper, Fenn—I can't understand a physician signing it."

Dr. Fenn said nothing, only scowled and waited. After another pause, Dr. Lee continued:

"It is so unlike the Derby case. There, there were no relations at all, while here there are parents: besides, Miss Derby was naturally timid and easily managed, while this girl, Cornelia Gordon, is as fiery as a Tartar."

Dr. Fenn tapped a medicine chest that stood near him, and smiled significantly as he replied:

"So long as the chloral holds out there need be no trouble in that direction. She is sleeping now; she can sleep—indefinitely."

"Still, I am very anxious about the matter," said his superior, scowling. "The sanitarium is doing well—it is making money. I would hate to be annoyed by any trouble, doctor."

"Suppose you take the papers to a lawyer and have them fixed up?" suggested the assistant. "If they are made out O. K., it will let us out. We are not required to know the patient."

"A good idea! I'll 'phone Wilson to meet me at two this afternoon," said Dr. Lee, quickly: "and I'll take the papers myself—they must not be trusted to a messenger."

He rose as he spoke to show that the inter-

view was over, but Dr. Fenn still lingered with his hand upon the medicine chest.

"Wilson is an idiot! He would only blat! Choose another attorney—there are dozens of them!" he said, dryly.

"You may be right, Fenn," was the thoughtful answer. "I'll try Howe & Ward, or Gross & Teall; they are reputable attorneys."

"Bosh! What's the matter with you, Lee? Are you anxious for trouble?" exclaimed Dr. Fenn, suddenly. "Can't you get it through your head that you don't want a reputable attorney?"

Dr. Lee stood still and stared for a minute, then he bent his head in silent admiration of the other's shrewdness.

"Take your papers to Richard Carson, 98 Temple street," said Fenn, quickly. "He's reputable enough—at least, he is at present."

"As you say, Fenn," was the superintendent's reply, "and I hope we have no further trouble with our new acquisition."

"I suppose I will go on giving the chloral for a time, at least," remarked Dr. Fenn, as he rose slowly, "and allow me to say right here that Carson has been reported rich. Once get his pen on that paper, and—well, even rogues love company!"

Dr. Lee smiled bitterly as he glanced at his assistant.

"You ought to be the superintendent here instead of me, Fenn," he said, sarcastically. "I have a fragment of conscience, but you haven't an atom. If it were not for you, I believe I could get back my self-respect—as it is——"

"As it is, you dare not lay claim to such a thing," finished the assistant, grimly. "I know you too well for you to make any bluff like that. The only difference between us, Lee, is that I am fairly honest."

Dr. Lee's pale face flushed and his eyes wavered in their glance. He was immensely relieved when his assistant left the office.

A moment later some one tapped at his door. It was Mrs. Mason, the supervisor, her face as impassive as ever.

"I came to report, sir, that Miss Thompson says that the new patient cannot take any more chloral," she said, calmly. "It does not act as it should—it is making her crazy!"

Dr. Lee bit his lips, but the woman did not look at him. She was standing with averted eyes awaiting his answer.

"Miss Thompson is to give the medicines according to Dr. Fenn's instructions," he said, finally. "How dare she presume to criticise the treatment? Report the next trace of her insubordination to me immediately, Mrs. Mason!"

The supervisor bowed and turned away. A moment later she had thought of something.

"It is company day to-day, sir. Shall Miss Gordon be seen?" she asked, with just a trace of interest in her tones. "She might say something, sir, which would be misleading."

Dr. Lee stroked his beard for a moment thoughtfully, then he modulated his voice to its customary smoothness.

"I think she will be sleeping during company hours, Mrs. Mason. But, if she is awake, give her another dose of chloral."

The supervisor vanished this time to carry out her orders. If she was anything more than a machine, she did not show it. Miss Thompson took her reprimand in grim, sarcastic silence. She had a mind of her own and she knew when to use it.

"That's the last drop of that stuff she'll get to-day," she muttered to herself, as she went to the lavatory and emptied the "sleeping draught" into the sink. Then she filled the bottle with water, which was exactly the same color.

When she went back into the ward again, Marion was looking at her. In spite of a double dose of the stuff, the girl was not even drowsy.

"Miss Thompson," she whispered, weakly, as the nurse went to the side of her bed, "I am sorry I rebelled—I should not have done it! I know you are not to blame, you have to do as you are told, but, oh, must I stay in this place forever? Is there no way that I can get word to those who love me?"

Once more the grim nurse felt a suspicion dart through her mind. It did not seem possible that this girl's brain could be affected. With only a pleasant smile, she unbound Marion's hands. There was no danger now of another outburst.

She was trying to think what was best to say, when suddenly a weird voice echoed

across the ward, and a poor, demented creature came sidling toward Marion, singing:

"Woe, woe! Weariness and woe! Hurrah for liberty! For sunshine and freedom! There's a good time coming! It's almost here! Hurrah! Here we go! All in a chariot of fire! Three cheers for the flag; we are going to glory!"

Drawing a bottle of alcohol from her sleeve, which she had picked up from a table nearby, she dashed the contents on the bedclothing at the foot of Marion's bed.

The next instant, before any one could stop her, she struck a match and threw it lighted on the bed.

A cry of horror went up as a burst of flame was seen to spring from the flimsy covering.

The queer creature bounded away, fairly screaming with shrill laughter. She still held the bottle in her hand, and she scattered what was left in it over cots and tables. The flames spread as if by magic.

The instant Marion found her bed on fire, she raised herself to a sitting posture, and stared at the flames, well-nigh overcome with horror.

Miss Thompson was already tearing at the blazing sheets. Then Marion sprang to the floor, and, without a word, she flew down the long corridor.

CHAPTER VII.

BAFFLED.

As she reached the door, Marion glanced back over her shoulder. The flames had spread to the adjoining bed, and the curtains at three windows were blazing fiercely. Shrieks and cries, some of horror, and others of amusement, came from every cot, and for just a moment the young girl was undecided.

Should she go back and attempt to rescue any of those wretched creatures?

As she looked at them, her heart was thrilled with heroic pity, but the trembling of her limbs warned her that such an attempt would be sheer folly.

She could hardly save herself; in fact, she did not even know how to find her way through the building. Every door was locked, and every window guarded

Miss Thompson had rushed from the ward to sound an alarm, and, as Marion glanced around eagerly, she saw her opportunity.

Some one had opened the door of the room where the patients' clothing was kept, and, at the first cry of fire, had darted out, leaving a bunch of keys dangling in the lock and an array of garments strewn about in disorder. As quick as a flash, the young girl slipped inside, drawing the key from the lock and then locked the door upon herself.

She was her own jailer now, but she was surrounded by danger. The clothes-room was close to the ward, and the fire might reach it.

She sank down, helplessly, upon a pile of clothing. She had over-taxed her strength, and it had deserted her.

The screams of the patients reached her ears indistinctly now, and then came the tramp of heavy feet and the splashing and hissing of water.

She could hear the patients being hurried from the ward, and now and then the hoarse voices of the excited physicians and helpers penetrated the thick walls of her prison.

Over and over again she attempted to rise, thinking that, after all, she might be able to help some one, but at last a faintness like death came over her and she sank down among the piles of clothing in absolute unconsciousness.

When she came to her senses again, the room was as dark as midnight, and great puffs of smoke were coming through the keyhole.

She roused herself slowly and struggled hard to remember what had happened; then, with a stifled cry, she sprang to her feet, and her first act was to finger the keys which she still held tenaciously.

The fire was over, doubtless, and she had been spared. Neither the flames nor her enemies had been able to discover her.

There was no way to light the place, so she sat down again in the darkness; then her brain seemed to grow suddenly keen and her wits began working.

Perhaps she could escape from this awful place! It was a thing which, even in her helplessness, she did not shrink from trying.

As quickly as she could, she put on some of the garments about her, selecting them as best she could with only her sense of touch to guide her—then she carefully unlocked the door and peered out into the corridor.

Such a scene of desolation as met her eyes! The whole hall, which was dimly lighted, was scorched and blackened, and there was not a sign of attendant or patient. Water an inch deep lay on the floor in places, while piles of water-soaked rubbish were heaped here and there, showing how desperately they had worked to control the fire.

The hospital ward was more or less isolated from the main building of the institution, and, as Marion peered around, she could see that it alone had been injured.

"It has been abandoned, I am sure," she whispered, delightedly; "now, if I can only reach the yard, I may be able to escape! Thank Heaven, it is night! How long I must have been unconscious!"

She crept weakly across the hall to the outer door, which, now that the hospital ward had been deserted, was standing wide open.

Another turn to the right brought her to another door—there were sounds of muffled voices coming through the thick wood, so she groped her way in another direction. Listening carefully, and using her key with the most extreme caution, she finally reached the yard, and, at the first breath of pure air, all her courage came back to her.

There was a small door in the high board fence which led to another yard, then another door, probably, and then the lawn—and freedom.

A sigh of thankfulness escaped her lips, and, as she staggered on, her lips moved softly.

"Oh, Reginald, Reginald! If you only knew!" she murmured, pitiably, "but I am coming, darling! No one shall stop me!"

She crept closer to the fence and kept well in the shadow, glancing up at the dark building with its small, dull windows, as though she feared it was a sentinel with grim eyes watching her every movement.

The sky was dark, but the stars were shining brightly, and, as she felt the rough boards carefully in her search for the gate, the very loneliness of the yard chilled her soul with horror.

Suddenly a woman's voice rang out shrilly from one of the grated windows. It was one of the demented inmates calling wildly to the stars, but for a second the young girl's heart beat fiercely for fear that she had been detected.

"I must escape! I must!" she whispered, between her white lips. "Oh, my poor, dear sister, how you must be worrying about me! Who could have done me this awful wrong? Who, but some one who wished to take me from my lover; but they shall not succeed! I am free! And I am going to him!"

She touched the lock of the rude gate as she breathed the last word. Her heart was beating wildly, and her white teeth were set with determination.

Suddenly, the strength deserted her arm, and it fell helpless at her side.

Some one had inserted a key upon the other side, and was turning it in the lock with a vigorous movement.

She had only time to shrink back into the shadow of the high fence, when the gate swung open, and a woman stood before her.

Marion clenched her hands, and almost gasped for breath.

Was she to be imprisoned again, after all her effort?

The maniac behind the grated window seemed to answer her question, for at that moment she put her face close to the bars and gave vent to a peal of mocking laughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRIEND.

"Miss Thompson!"

Marion whispered the name in an accent of horror, as the woman stepped deliberately toward her and scrutinized her in the starlight.

"So here you are! Thank Heaven, I have found you!" exclaimed the attendant, calmly. "I was absolutely sure that you were not hurt, but I can't imagine where you went so quick, Miss Gordon."

Marion caught her breath with a little gasp. She was sorely disappointed and could hardly keep from crying.

"I ran into the clothing-room, and I found some keys," she said, simply. "Will you please let me go home to my friends, Miss Thompson?"

"And lose my position!" said the attendant, quickly.

Marion took a step nearer, and laid her hand upon her arm.

"I swear that I am rich, Miss Thompson," she said, softly, "and I will give you a fair salary, or more, if you will let me escape! You need not aid me—only let me go, Miss Thompson. It cannot possibly harm you, for no one will know it. They will blame the fire—perhaps they will think I am dead, even!"

Miss Thompson leaned against the fence, in the shadow of the little door, and Marion moved nearer as she waited for her answer.

"Tell me more about yourself," said the attendant, calmly. "Don't prevaricate, Miss Gordon, but tell me everything you can that will convince me you have been wronged and that I ought to help you!"

She took the young girl's arm as she spoke, and led her to a rude bench which was exactly underneath the jibbering maniac's window.

Marion shuddered as the shrill laugh rang again upon the air, but she hastened to comply with her companion's orders.

"I am Marion Marlowe, and I was born in Hickorytown, Connecticut," she began, quickly, "and for some time I have been on the road with the Temple Theatrical Company. I left when the company disbanded a few weeks ago, and I have in the bank a hundred thousand dollars, which has recently been given to me. I am engaged to marry Dr. Reginald Brookes, but I was taken ill at my hotel, and there was no one to stay with me,

as my friends were all scattered, so I hired a nurse, and she inveigled me here. That is all I know of my present position, but that is gospel truth—you have only to write to Dr. Brookes or any of my friends to prove it, Miss Thompson."

The attendant shook her head and drew a long sigh.

"Those things do happen—I know that all right, but whoever did it must be almighty daring! Why, it means State's prison for some one—I don't know who—Miss Marlowe."

"Nor do I," said Marion, with a grateful smile, as she heard her own name. "I did not know that I had an enemy in the world, but this is the work of fiends, and they must be punished."

"I'll tell you what I'll do!" said the attendant, finally. "I'll mail any letter that you may write to your friends, Miss Marlowe. It is foolish, perhaps, and it is against the rules of the institution, but, pshaw! What do I care! I'll risk that much for you!"

"Then I will go back and wait," said Marion, gratefully, "but, oh, please, dear Miss Thompson, don't let them give me any more chloral!"

Miss Thompson smiled as she took her charge by the arm, then something happened in the gloomy yard that thrilled Marion's heart with joy, for the attendant suddenly stooped and kissed her tenderly.

"Poor child! Poor little girl! I wish I knew the truth about you," she said, softly. "We women grow hard and heartless in this business, but it would vanish mighty quick in my case, I tell you, if I was sure that you were a victim of treachery!"

"It is either treachery or a blunder," said Marion, quickly. "I am as sane as you or Dr. Lee! I cannot understand why I was brought to this building, unless it is that I am the prey of conspirators—fiends, who are eager to prevent my marriage."

They had reached the door of a ward now, and, as she put her key in the lock, Miss Thompson's manner changed instantly.

As she escorted Marion into the presence of a group of her companions, she exhibited her victoriously.

"She hid in the clothes-room all day, and I found her," she said, quickly. "I'll report to the office through the tube, I guess, and now, whoever left that key in the clothes-room door had better do penance immediately. It means 'get out, quick,' you know, if the superintendent hears of it!"

She went over to the speaking tube as she finished, to report that her patient was safe, but did not mention the keys, or where she had found her.

"Time enough to give details when I am asked," she said, grimly. "It's little they care, anyway, so long as they haven't lost her."

One of the girls stepped forward and held out her hand for the keys, and although Marion felt that she was relinquishing her liberty, she passed them to her instantly.

"There they are," she said, very sweetly. "You left them in the clothes-room door, when the fire broke out. I tried to run away with them, but Miss Thompson found me."

Her words were so natural that the attendants stared at her, then they looked at Miss Thompson, and then at each other.

Miss Thompson bit her lips, and there was a mischievous twinkle in her eyes as she glanced back at her friends, but she managed, after a second, to speak indifferently.

"Dear me, how you stare! Any one would fancy that you thought the girl was sane! Why, she's as 'mad as a March hare!' How can you be so stupid!"

Marion's big eyes opened wider, but she was beginning to understand Miss Thompson now, and, a moment later, she followed her to her room as meekly as a kitten.

"I'll bring you a pencil and paper after the night watch has made her first round," whispered the attendant, as she left her, "and then I'll sneak out and mail it so your lover will get it to-morrow."

Marion tried to thank her, but her voice failed as she spoke, for at last she was seeing a first sign of sympathy.

When she finally closed her eyes, it was to fall into an exhausted slumber, but there was a smile on her white lips and a ray of hope in her heart, for her hastily-scribbled message was on its way to her lover.

Miss Thompson kept her word and mailed the letter; then one light after another went out, and the big building became silent, save for an occasional cry from a wakeful inmate.

CHAPTER IX.

A WORSE FATE.

Despite the apparent stillness, there was a conference going on in another part of the building.

Dr. Lee was seated in his private office, talking to Dr. Fenn.

"I took the papers to Carson," Dr. Lee was saying, "and what do you think, the man is dumb! He is at home, in his bed, suffering from a stroke of apoplexy!"

Dr. Fenn almost sprang from his chair, and his face turned ashen, then he controlled himself by a tremendous effort.

"Then I tried to find the physicians who

signed that paper," continued the superintendent, "and they are every one of them 'fakes.' There are no such names in the directory. Now, who the mischief have we on our hands, Fenn, and how, in all creation, are we going to get rid of her?"

As he asked the questions, he stopped directly in front of his assistant, who had very nearly regained his usual manners.

"We are not to blame for her commitment," was the savage answer. "We received an application from the patient's father—we answered it, and her incarceration followed. Some one, presumably her father, paid us three months' board in advance. I don't see where the law can touch us. We have done nothing irregular!"

"Nevertheless, I'd like to get rid of her," was the reply. "Just suppose it should turn out that the girl's story was true! We would surely be in for an investigation, if nothing more."

"And an investigation might reveal a few undesirable points in the management of the 'Home Rest!'" answered the assistant, sneeringly.

He was still stroking his mustache and smiling scornfully, but his superior officer was fast becoming more nervous.

There was not a secret of the institution that Dr. Fenn did not know, and it suddenly occurred to the superintendent to be diplomatic.

"See here, Fenn! I know you are envious of my opportunity to make money in this enterprise," he began, softly. "Suppose I take you in as a sort of partner—give you half of the income for half of the work and responsibility! Will you let old bones lie buried and start afresh, old fellow?"

Dr. Fenn stopped stroking his mustache, and stared at him a minute. He did not quite understand this change in the superintendent's tactics.

"I'll think it over," he said, cautiously. "Let's see, how much is the sanitarium making?"

Dr. Lee motioned to his desk and to a safe in the corner of the office.

"There are the books—look them over," he said, blandly; "and there's no time like the present. I am going to my room, so I will not disturb you."

There was just a motion of Dr. Fenn's head as his superior left the room, then he rose to his feet, quickly, and began pacing the office.

"As if I did not know every word and every figure in those books," he muttered, grimly. "Lee must take me for a fool, if he thinks I don't know his income! I'd like it for just one year, and, by the gods, I'll have it! No use in working a year for it, either!

He stepped to the door as he spoke and turned the key, then rapidly crossed the room and opened the safe in the corner.

The moment he did so, his eyes fell upon some papers—they were the commitment papers of the patient "Cornelia Gordon."

He put them in his pocket, and then opened the cash drawer. There was money enough to be a slight temptation, but he shook his head and closed the door promptly.

"Not enough for yours truly," he muttered, under his breath; then, just for a minute, he did some hard thinking.

The game had not worked like the Derby case. He had engineered that fiendish deal, and carried it through in triumph, and the sanitarium had cleared ten thousand dollars by the transaction.

A sane woman had been committed there, no one but himself knew exactly by whom, but, in that case, the superintendent had kept his nerve, and none of the parties concerned had suffered from apoplexy.

As he rose from before the safe, a sudden thought flashed through his mind, and, with skillful fingers, he changed the combination.

It would need an expert to open the safe now in case Dr. Lee should decide that he wished to view the contents before morning.

He left the office gently, after relighting his lantern, then carefully consulted his watch in the corridor.

The silence of the big building oppressed him a little, and, as he passed the outer door, he was startled by a sudden peal of the bell.

It was a telegram for himself, and the message was written in cipher. As he read it, his eyes flashed and his face brightened instantly. There was yet another way to gain the amount he yearned for.

Steve Blakely had wired him some important news.

A reward of ten thousand dollars had been offered for knowledge that would lead to the recovery of one Marion Marlowe. It would be upon the front pages of all of the morning papers.

He glanced again at his watch and then examined his lantern critically. The night watch was on the upper floor—it was his golden opportunity.

An ugly smile crossed his face as he stole through the wards. There was no thought in his heart of mercy for the girl, for his brain seemed on fire with its mad thirst for money.

There was not a sound in the attendants' room, and he glided past the door like an evil shadow.

Marion was sleeping soundly when he let

himself quietly into her room and bent above her with a triumphant leer upon his features.

With practised skill he bared her arm, without disturbing her. Then, taking a glistening instrument from his pocket, he thrust it against the flesh and pressed a knob on top. He was giving her a hypodermic injection.

The moon was trying to shine, but the sky was clouded. Awaiting a moment when it was pitch dark outside, the doctor raised the girl in his arms, wrapped only in a light blanket, and bore her from the room, locking the door carefully behind him.

Despite his caution, there was a click as he took the key out of the lock, which awoke Miss Thompson with a start.

Turning over in bed, she reached out for the knob of her door, which she could just touch, and opened the door a trifle.

She was just in time to catch a glimpse of Dr. Fenn passing by with Marion in his arms, and, as she closed the door again, she heard him steal softly down the corridor.

"What the mischief is he doing now?" she asked herself, quickly, as the flash of his lantern disappeared.

Springing out of bed, she quickly donned a few clothes, without awaking her roommate, and, throwing a wrap over her, and lighting a lantern, she hastened out of the room.

Near the door of Marion's room she spied something white lying on the floor.

"What's that, I wonder?" she exclaimed, in a whisper. "He must have dropped it out of his pocket as he was carrying her. Well, I guess there is no harm in taking a look at it!"

She bent as she spoke, and picked up a letter. Thrusting it into her dress, she started for the entrance to the ward, determined to find out where the doctor was taking Marion.

Five minutes later, Dr. Fenn deposited his burden in a small, vacant cottage in the very rear of the grounds, which was used, upon rare occasions, for the isolation of violent patients.

No one would dream of searching for her there, he thought, for the responsibility of her escape would be promptly laid upon her attendants, who would have no motive whatsoever for locking her in the cottage.

He intended to accuse Miss Thompson in the morning. He hated the woman, and it would serve as an excuse to get rid of her.

Now that Carson was stricken, there was nothing more to hope for from him, but there was still the reward of ten thousand dollars, and who could earn it more easily than Stephen Blakely?

As this thought flashed through his mind, the miserable wretch chuckled, then the heavy lock clicked, and Marion was once more a prisoner.

As the doctor slipped noiselessly away, he was quite unconscious of a pair of glittering black eyes that were taking in the situation from the shadow of the main building.

CHAPTER X.

THE SEARCH.

Dr. Lee did not return to his office that night; he was busily occupied with other matters.

When he did glance in, it was ten o'clock in the morning. His face was ashen, and he held in his hands a morning paper.

A gleam of satisfaction lighted his face when he found that his assistant was not there, and, scribbling a hasty note, he laid it upon his desk, then proceeded to give the under officers some hurried orders.

When Dr. Fenn appeared, an hour later, after an early trip to the city, his superior's carriage was just returning from the railway depot, where it had left the superintendent awaiting the express for Boston.

A curse escaped him as he glanced at the note, then the scowl upon his swarthy forehead slowly lightened.

"Gone for a brief vacation," he muttered, angrily. "A clever trick to throw the responsibility upon me. Well, for once I am glad of your absence, you traitor!"

He seated himself at his desk, and smiled with satisfaction. His errand to the city had not been fruitless.

After opening the morning mail, he suddenly thought of something, and, a moment later, the papers which he had taken from the safe a few hours before were safely back in their special compartment.

"Now to begin the search for Miss Gordon," he whispered, as he glanced over the report which the night watch had left for him. "I'll send for Miss Thompson at once and make my accusation, then——"

His thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of the clerk, who was holding a card in his hand and looking greatly excited.

"A gentleman who says we have his fiancée locked up here," he began, nervously.

Dr. Fenn turned pale, and his jaw dropped. This was a decided disappointment.

"I told him he must be mistaken," went on the clerk, rapidly, "but he insists, and, what is more, he is determined to see you. I told him the superintendent had gone, but he says any one in authority will answer."

Dr. Fenn took the card with trembling fi

gers. With all his speed he had been too slow, but how could any one know the identity of Cornelia Gordon?"

"Show him in," he managed to say, as the clerk still waited. "In Dr. Lee's absence, I suppose I must see him."

"Dr. Reginald Brookes!"

He repeated the name on the card automatically, then he bit his lips and sank back in his chair, making a heroic effort to receive his guest suavely.

Dr. Brookes hardly noticed the words of greeting. His handsome face was pale, and his eyes were heavy, but, as he approached the desk, he held out a letter.

"I received that this morning, and I wish to see the writer at once!" he said, hoarsely. "This lady is my fiancée, and she has been incarcerated here by force! God help you, sir, if you are in any way guilty!"

He was fairly trembling with rage, and his eyes flashed as he spoke. As he waited for the doctor's answer, his glance seemed to cut through and through him.

For just one minute Dr. Fenn succeeded in looking mystified, then he slowly pointed to the morning paper that lay on the desk where Dr. Lee had left it.

"I have just read that, and it has aroused my own suspicions," he tried to say, soberly. "I had no reason to think, until I saw that notice, that we had been the victims of such a transaction, but there has only been one patient received here who answered to that description, and she was committed under the name of Cornelia Gordon."

He rose as he spoke, and opened the safe. The next moment he had handed Dr. Brookes the commitment papers. The young man scanned them eagerly, and his eyes opened wider as he finished them.

"They are irregular, sir—I can see that at a glance! Who is 'Cornelia Gordon?' I must see her at once. There is no doubt in my mind that she is Marion Marlowe."

Dr. Fenn's dark face took on a worried look, and, as he motioned Dr. Brookes to a chair, he seemed genuinely distressed. It was almost a minute before he could answer him. Then, in a deeply sympathetic tone, he told him of the young girl's incarceration and that he regretted his superior's delay in looking into the matter.

Dr. Brookes stared questioningly, but his mood softened a little. There was just the merest chance that this man might not be guilty.

"Then she is here in this building," he said, with a sigh of relief.

Dr. Fenn shook his head, and his face grew even graver.

"She has escaped," he said, soberly, "but we are searching for her. Believing that there was something wrong about her incarceration, we cannot, of course, blame her. We have done what we could to unravel the mystery, and, if we have allowed her to escape, you must not blame us."

"Poor, dear Marion! Of course, she wished to escape!" exclaimed the young man, quickly. "Still, now that I have traced her here, I am sorry to have to look farther for her. Was she supplied with money, do you know, so that she could get back to the city?"

Some one tapped on the office door before the assistant could answer, and, almost instantly, the door opened and the porter entered.

"There's a young man in the parlor who insists upon coming in. I have told him you were engaged, but——"

"But that doesn't make any difference," shouted a boyish voice. "I am coming in just the same! You can't keep me out a minute longer!"

He darted into the office and stopped short when he saw Dr. Brookes, then both sprang forward and shook hands with each other.

"Hello, Doc! So you got here first, did you? Well, I thought you would!" exclaimed the youth. "I was held up at your office five minutes after you left, so I couldn't join you at the depot as we had planned, but I'm here at last. Have you found Marion?"

"She was here, but she has escaped, Bert," said the physician, quickly; then he turned again to the sanitarium physician.

"I showed Marion's letter to this young man this morning," he explained; "he is her friend and mine, and he is on the track of her enemies, also! There will be no mercy shown them if we find them—eh, Jackson?"

Bert's boyish face was clouded as he answered, savagely:

"You bet there won't! I'll see them drawn and quartered if I can! And, by the way, Doc, I've got a grain of information. It was the nurse, Mrs. Kearney, who told the people at the hotel that Marion had gone to Hickorytown, it wasn't Marion herself who told the story."

"Then she is the first criminal," cried Dr. Brookes, hotly. "Did you trace her, Bert? Does any one know where she went to?"

Bert shook his head.

"I put a detective on her track—it was all I could do, then I hurried over here, but it seems we have come for nothing!"

He stopped suddenly and gazed at his friend with an expression of despair, but, after a peculiar cough, Dr. Fenn asked him a question.

"You say you were 'held up,' Mr. Jackson. By whom, may I ask? Some one who knew

or thought they knew something of the young lady's whereabouts?"

"Some one who thought they knew! He was a crank!" was Bert's answer. "He agreed to send me straight to Marion if I would give ten thousand dollars."

"Perhaps, after all, it would have been well to have heeded him," said the assistant, slowly. "Miss Marlowe, if that is our patient's name, escaped in the night. It is barely possible she escaped from us only to find worse quarters."

"Great Scott! I did not think of that!" cried Bert, excitedly, "but, of course, I didn't know then that she had flew your coop! The doctor had only just shown me the letter an hour before, so I was dead sure that we would find her here when we came."

"We must begin our search at once," said Dr. Brookes, sternly, "so, if you please, we will take a look over your sanitarium."

"In the superintendent's absence, you have only to command me," said Dr. Fenn, suavely, then he rose with the utmost dignity and took a key from his pocket.

"You shall search the building, gentlemen, from garret to cellar," he said, quietly, "and if you find our patient you will be doing us a favor, for we are more than distressed over her disappearance. She was a sweet girl and it would give us great joy to restore her to her loved ones."

Dr. Brookes and Bert glanced sharply at each other; then, as the sanitarium physician led the way toward the wards, Bert bent over and whispered in his companion's ear, "He may be all right, but I think he is lying! Say, but won't I make hash of him if I find he's ill-treated Marion!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACCUSATION.

The "Home Rest Sanitarium" was in "apple-pie order" as the two young men were ushered through its wards, and, although they both peered about sharply, they could see nothing with which to find fault.

After every room had been looked into, Dr. Brookes turned to his guide.

"Now we will have a look at your yards, if you please," he said, quietly.

Dr. Fenn bit his lips. It was exactly what he had feared. Once out upon the grounds they would spy the cottage and he could see by their faces that they meant the search to be thorough.

"Sure! We're going to do the whole blooming ranch!" chimed in Bert Jackson, promptly. "Why, I'm even going upon the roof to look down the chimneys! Gee whiz! Just fancy our Marion in such a place! It's a wonder to me she kept her senses! I'd have gone clean off my trolley in about ten minutes!"

"God help the rascals who lured her here!" muttered Dr. Brookes again, in a grim voice, "and I have my suspicions, Bert, but I am trying to keep them quiet! Come, let's hurry our search and get back to the hotel! Marion may be there! We must not lose a minute!"

"You will look over the basement next, I presume," suggested Dr. Fenn, suavely.

Bert gave him a quick look and then winked at his companion.

"No, we'll do the yards!" he said, decidedly. "I'm hankering to get a glimpse behind some of those fences."

Dr. Fenn bit his lips, but he was obliged to yield, but his steps lagged a little as they left the building.

There were only two yards and they were quickly passed, then Bert suddenly caught a glimpse of the little cottage.

"Come, Doc! We may as well take a look into that cubbyhole!" he said, indifferently. "Of course, she couldn't get in there, unless she had keys, but, anyhow, we may as well look—it won't take a minute."

The assistant's face was as pale as death, and for a moment his limbs trembled so that he could hardly move.

Twenty-four hours longer and the reward would have been his. Steve Blakely was working at this very minute, and before another dawn they could have shared the ten thousand dollars between them.

But the two visitors were already making straight for the cottage, and summoning all his nerve he followed slowly.

A moment later a cry almost escaped his lips.

The door of the cottage was standing wide open.

Bert and the doctor entered, but he did not follow. He needed that minute of freedom to get back his color.

His bird had flown: he could hardly believe it. Then a rush of color dyed his face as the thought flashed into his mind—had he been suspected? What his guests said to him after that remained only a vague dream in his memory, but he got rid of them at last and went back to his office.

He was still seated at his desk, his head bowed upon his hands when another telegram from Steve Blakely was handed to him.

He jumped to his feet—he had forgotten Steve. He should have notified him at once, and now two hours had been wasted.

A bitter smile crossed his face as he deciphered the message.

It told him exactly what he already knew, that Marion's whereabouts had been traced and that he must proceed with the utmost caution.

Well, there was nothing more for him to do, for both the girl and the reward had escaped him completely.

Now all that was left was to throw the blame upon others and go on as he had gone before—until another opportunity offered.

He would have answered Steve's telegram, but he did not dare. It was of no avail now, and, besides, he wanted nothing upon paper even though it was written in a clever cipher.

Suddenly it occurred to him that he had forgotten Miss Thompson.

He decided to see her at once and make his accusation.

Mrs. Mason answered his call and listened to his order, then, just for once, her voice betrayed emotion as she answered.

"Miss Thompson went at daylight," she said, in a frightened tone. "I should have reported it before, but I did not know it."

Dr. Fenn sprang to his feet and glared at her an instant, then he dismissed her with a gesture and went back to his musings.

Another interruption a moment later startled him considerably. There was a tap upon the door and Miss Thompson in street attire, stood calmly before him.

"That is the man! That is Dr. Fenn!" she said, distinctly, to some one behind her; then, as she stood pointing at him deliberately, two well-dressed men stepped into the office.

Dr. Fenn did not attempt to rise, but simply stared at them weakly.

He had been expecting something all day and now it was coming.

"I accuse him of complicity in the crime of stealing Marion Marlowe, and incarcerating her in this lunatic asylum," went on the attendant, firmly; "moreover, I accuse him of the second crime of stealing her again and hiding her in the hope of getting the reward when he saw that his first plan was in danger of being frustrated!"

Dr. Fenn leaned forward, his eyes fairly bulging; then, as one of the men touched him on the shoulder, he cried out, hoarsely:

"Upon what grounds do you make such assertions, miss? How dare you accuse me of such vile transactions?"

"Upon your own word," said Miss Thompson, triumphantly holding up a letter. "Upon the statements made by yourself in this letter to Stephen Blakely, which you dropped near Marion Marlowe's room!"

There was a hoarse snarl of rage, and Dr. Fenn sprang forward, but the detective at his side seized and held him firmly.

"You must come with me, Dr. Fenn," said the detective, "and, when we are ready, we will see your superior officer also, although we understand that he is entirely innocent."

The assistant groaned and his lip twitched convulsively.

Dr. Lee had escaped, as usual, scot free, while he must suffer the penalty of his misdemeanor.

In the horror of the moment, he forgot everything but his own chagrin, and no one saw fit to enlighten him as to what had become of Marion.

They did give him a piece of information, however concerning Richard Carson, that caused him to wince.

The treacherous lawyer had died that very morning from the stroke of apoplexy.

"Unfortunately," concluded the detective, "his speech was not restored to him before he died, so we could get no further evidence against him and against you."

This maddened Dr. Fenn almost beyond endurance. To think that he alone had been the cause of his own downfall!

CHAPTER XII.

THE INVESTIGATION.

Dr. Fenn's last glimpse of Marion had been when he laid her down in the damp, isolated cottage at the asylum, intending to have her removed secretly, and then found by Steve Blakely, in order that the two might divide the reward that had been offered.

When he saw her again, she was leaning upon her lover's arm, the most beautiful creature he had ever seen, her great eyes fixed upon him with a glance of horror.

They were in a crowded courtroom, but Marion was surrounded by friends, while Dr. Fenn stood alone—he had not even his "pal," Steve Blakely, to keep him company.

"We'll wing him, too, some day," Bert exclaimed, as soon as the case was over and they were all leaving the scene together.

"Oh, I am so glad we did not know anything about it until it was all over!" cried Lena Ellis, his gay young sweetheart.

"So am I," cried another voice, as Mrs. Burnside stepped forward and put her arm around Marion.

"We had just returned from Boston when the letter from Miss Thompson reached Captain Canfield, and then your note came so soon after that we did not have time to worry."

"Dear, faithful Miss Thompson!" exclaimed Marion, as she held out her hand to the attendant, who was walking near her. "What would I have done, if it had not been

for her! She mailed my letter to Reginald, you know, and so gave the very first inkling of my whereabouts to you!"

"Then she shall have the reward!" spoke up Captain Canfield. "And she deserves it, too, for the way she cornered that rascal! You should have seen Dr. Fenn's face when she showed him his own letter!"

"A rascal should be more careful of his correspondence," spoke up Bert, quickly; "but that letter was a dead give away! It made everything else easy! It was a great stroke of luck that the fellow dropped it."

"And that it fell into the hands of a friend and not an enemy," said Marion, quickly; then she glanced at her lover, a little shyly.

"What does your mother say of all this, Reginald?" she asked, in a low voice, "or is she still too ill for you to tell her?"

"I have told her all—everything," was the smiling answer. "Of course, she is shocked at Mr. Carson's perfidy, but she is more than ever assured of my love for you and she will not breathe so much as a whisper against our marriage."

"And I am sure the rest of us won't!" burst out Bert, impetuously, as he tucked his sweetheart's arm in his own very tenderly.

"No, we'll dance with light hearts at your wedding, girlie," said Mrs. Burnside, sweetly, "so hurry, please, and set the happy day."

Marion blushed furiously as she murmured:

"We have already set it!"

"What!" gasped the others in chorus, while Marion glanced up to find Dr. Brookes looking tenderly at her.

"Yes," announced the doctor, his handsome face beaming with joy, "I don't propose to give her a chance to get into any more scrapes. She has consented to be married two weeks from to-day."

When the congratulations were over, Bert insisted that it was "up to" him to treat the party to a dinner on the instant, and without waiting for any one to object he led the way to one of the large restaurants.

"I would like to go straight back and do something for all of those poor crazy people," said Marion, suddenly. "Do you think there will be an investigation, Reginald?"

"I am sure of it, darling," was the doctor's quick reply. "In fact, the captain and I have already started it. Oh, I can just see the fun when Fenn gets to testifying against his superior officer? It's plainly to be seen that he hates him for some reason or other!"

"And I shall add my quota of information," said Miss Thompson, smilingly, "for, thanks to you all, I need never go back into one of those places. I can live in comfort now, and, perhaps, make myself useful to some one."

"As if you had not already been of use," cried Marion, sweetly. "Oh, I would have died in that place, if it hadn't been for you!"

"You would not have lived long in that cottage, I admit," said the ex-attendant, soberly, "but I can't help smiling to think what a job I had getting you out. You see, I had to be ever so careful not to let the doctor know he had wakened me, and after I saw where he put you, I had to be more cautious still, so as not to let the night watch catch me. It was lucky the clothes room was near the hospital ward, for I was able to get in there and get some clothes for you without a soul so much as hearing me."

"And then we stole out and ran as fast as we could," said Marion, "and, after endless walking, we ventured to stop at a little hotel, where we wrote the letter to Captain Canfield!"

"Well, I don't wonder that wretch looked like a ghost when we came out of that cottage," said Bert, indignantly. "Why, he probably felt like thirty cents when he saw the door of his trap had been opened.

"He'll feel cheaper than that when that investigation is over," laughed Miss Thompson. "There are things about the 'Home Rest Sanitarium' which, if they ever come to light, will send both Fenn and Lee to the penitentiary."

"We'll dig them up, then!" remarked Bert, promptly, as they all sat down at the table and ordered their dinners.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARION'S WEDDING.

Marion's wedding day was one of those beautiful mild days which always come in the last of April.

She had decided to be married in church, and now the last touch had been put on the decorations, the last detail of the service had been arranged and nothing further remained to be done before the service itself.

Dr. Brookes had asked Bert to act as his best man, and Bert had consented willingly, but yet when he told Marion of his intention, he did it with a grimace that drew forth peals of laughter from the beautiful girl.

Alma and her husband were still on their wedding tour, so Marion chose Miss Ellis as maid of honor. There were no bridesmaids.

The ceremony was to take place at eight o'clock in the evening, but long before that hour the church was well filled with both her friends and many who knew Marion only through her reputation.

Marion's father was so appalled at the thought of walking down the aisle with Marion on his arm, that he declared he would never do it. He stuck to his resolution, too, so the matter ended by Mr. Canfield offering to act instead.

The hour for the ceremony had now arrived, and the wedding party, with the exception of Dr. Brookes and Bert Jackson, was assembled in the entrance to the church.

Marion was looking radiant in a dress of point lace over white chiffon. The veil matched the gown and was arranged in coronet effect, with a wreath of artificial orange blossoms. Her bouquet was made up of lilies of the valley and white orchids, with a full shower effect of narrow satin streamers.

On the left of her corsage a large diamond star sparkled. This was Dr. Brookes' gift to his bride.

She was looking forward at the crowded church, eager only for the service to begin, and yet at that moment, Dr. Brookes and Bert Jackson were in the most awkward kind of a predicament at the rear of the church.

They had but a minute before reached the rear door, intending to enter the church that way.

Dr. Brookes, hurriedly grasping the knob, turned it, but the door did not yield to his pressure. Turning his head, he stared blankly at Bert.

"Is it locked?" gasped Bert, too astonished at first to think what to do.

"Yes," answered the doctor, "it's locked. Hold on, we'll see if we can make any one inside come to the door," and with that he rapped briskly.

They waited a minute or two, but there was no response.

Then Dr. Brookes rapped louder.

Still there was no response.

"What's the matter with them in there?" cried Bert, commencing to get impatient. "Are they all asleep, I wonder?"

"You've got me," responded the doctor, nervously. "What can that fool of a sexton mean by locking us out," and he rattled the door viciously and banged on it once more.

After another period of suspense, in which they both waited in vain for some one to open the door for them, Dr. Brookes wheeled around and grasped Bert by the arm.

"There's nothing for it, old fellow, but to brave the whole crowd. We must enter by the front door."

"What!" cried Bert, "and file down——"

"Yes, yes—hurry—it's the only way," and the doctor fairly dragged Bert to the entrance.

It was now high time the service commenced and the organist was looking anxiously for the appearance of the clergyman and the groom.

A cry of surprise burst from Marion as Dr. Brookes strode up to the door, followed by Bert, and, for an instant, a shadow of anxiety crossed her face.

This disappeared the next moment, however, when Dr. Brookes explained his sudden appearance to her.

Then opening the door, the groom and his best man walked over to a side aisle and passed down toward the door of the vestry room.

Their tall, manly figures instantly attracted attention, and when it was discovered who the doctor was, a buzz of conversation swept over the church, causing Dr. Brookes to swear eternal vengeance on the man who locked the side door.

This was all forgotten, though, the next moment, for the signal had been quickly given to the organist, and before the doctor or Bert had time to make any inquiries, the notes of the famous wedding march from "Lohengrin" burst forth.

The rear doors swung open, and Marion, showing her happiness in every line of her face, appeared on the arm of Mr. Canfield, while all in the big auditorium rose to their feet and awaited the bridal party. At the same instant the vestry-room doors opened, and three figures emerged, and walked quickly to the chancel steps. They were the officiating clergyman, Dr. Brookes and Bert Jackson.

And now the music was hushed and the solemn words of the marriage service were the only sounds that could be heard.

To Marion, it all seemed like a delightful dream, and her eyes were swimming as she bent them on those of her lover, and declared, with her whole soul in her words, "I will," to the clergyman's question if she "would have this man to be her wedded husband."

Then it was all over, and she was called back to herself by the silence which followed the clergyman's last words.

"My wife," whispered Dr. Brookes, tenderly, as he turned and placed her hand in his arm. She looked up at him and smiled brightly, as he led her down the chancel steps.

Mendelssohn's glorious wedding march had begun and the couple passed down between the rows of smiling faces. Marion's face was smiling, too, and she never looked prettier or more winning than she did at that moment.

Then the outer door was reached, a wrap was thrown about her shoulders, she was bundled into a carriage, followed by Dr. Brookes. The door was snapped, and off

they were whirled to her sister Dollie's house, two blocks away, where a reception had been planned. Marion spoke not a word all the way—only clung to her husband's hand. In fact, there was scarcely time to compose herself before the carriage stopped and their friends came hurrying up in other carriages.

Such a reception as it was!

Bert was everywhere and kept the company in roars of laughter by his remarks and pranks. He openly declared that Marion had jilted him, and went on to give the full account of her "perfidy," as he called it.

Marion, standing at Dr. Brookes' side, was enjoying the festivities immensely, and yet now she was dying to talk to her husband alone.

Finally she slipped away from the doctor, only looking back as she passed through the door, to catch her husband's eyes on her, beaming with admiration.

Shortly after, the doctor disappeared to change his dress suit for a frock coat. He was the first to return, and Marion came in shortly after in a most becoming traveling suit of brown cloth.

Then followed good-bys, and the newly married couple started for their carriage.

Bert was still up to his tricks, though, and they had no sooner reached the sidewalk than they were greeted with a perfect shower of rice from the windows of Dollie's parlors.

The doctor helped Marion into the carriage and followed as quickly as he could.

Once more the door snapped, the driver whipped up his horses and the carriage sped down the street, bound for the railroad station.

Marion became strangely quiet the moment she entered the carriage.

As it started up, however, she turned toward Dr. Brookes, and her eyes were full of love.

"My husband!"

That was all she said, but oh, how sweet those two words sounded to her. And yet they sounded infinitely sweeter to the handsome young man at her side.

His arms were around her in an instant, and as she nestled her head on his breast, he kissed her lips fervently again and again.

"My darling! My darling!" he whispered; then his face became grave, as he said:

"Oh, Marion, my dearest, my wife—I was never worthy of you!"

But Marion only clung still closer to him, and at his last words she raised one hand and laid it on his lips.

Dr. Brookes understood and kissed her hand rapturously.

* * * * * * *

A week later the investigation of the "Home Rest Sanitarium" was ordered by the authorities and the rascality of the sanitarium doctors was exposed to the public.

Miss Thompson did what she could to help the good work along and testified on the stand to what she had seen in the building. Her words made a wonderful sensation in the court, for it is rarely that one lives to tell such a story as hers, and at the end of the trial both culprits were convicted.

Steve Blakely had vanished like a breath of vapor, but Miss Kearney, Marion's treacherous nurse, was found a little later. She was haunting the dead lawyer's office, trying to collect her five hundred dollars.

But Marion quickly forgot her terrible experience in the love and devotion of her husband. Both she and the doctor were blissfully happy, for their love was deathless.

Bert went to college, as his father had planned, and remains true to his sweetheart, who has never wavered in her affection toward him, since that one time when she thought Bert in love with the treacherous Miss Fredericks.

Mrs. Burnside, formerly in Marion's company, and her beautiful daughter, Ruby, who is fast growing up, are frequent callers at the Brookes residence, as are Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax, the latter being Marion's old chum, Alma Allyn.

Marion met Mr. Temple, her old theatrical manager and admirer, once on the street. He was very cordial, but, although she invited him to call on Dr. Brookes and herself, he could never be induced to do so. He is still a theatrical manager, and the Brookes occasionally hear of him, and of Ida Inez and her boy, Jackets, two other members of the company, through Mrs. Burnside, who is touring with them.

Mr. Canfield declared that his son's fiancée was more than half his daughter-in-law already, and insisted that Miss Ellis should live at his home until Bert completed his education. The old gentleman has taken a great fancy to her, and between Bert and Lena all his affections are wrapped up "in his children," as he calls them.

And now, with her heart full of love, and the brightest of prospects before her, we will take leave, for the present, of beautiful Marion Marlowe, or Marion Marlowe Brookes, as she must henceforth be called.

When we hear from her again—and who among the readers of "My Queen" does not wish to—we may be sure of finding her the

same true, loyal woman that our readers have come to know so well.

The young girl's career had, indeed, been a tragic one, but she had passed with true womanly courage and dignity along the path of her young life, from Farm to Fortune.

THE END.

PATTERN COLUMN.

By special arrangements with the manufacturers we are enabled to supply the readers of MY QUEEN with the patterns of all garments described or illustrated in this column at TEN CENTS each. Address, "Pattern Column," MY QUEEN, 238 William Street, New York City.

FASHION NOTES.

Nearly all of the separate skirts these days open on the left side, and are made with hooks or snap fastening. The pretty style for the back of a skirt is one inverted plait or a fan of three inverted plaits, closely overlapping at the top.

Serviceable summer dresses will be a chambray, linen crash, denim and other firm wash goods, trimmed with white or colored pique or embroidery. These are particularly adapted to the "Eton suit" mode, so that the coat can be dispensed with on hot days, leaving only a thin muslin blouse.

The pretty Russian toque is a comfortable and well-favored head-covering this winter, and is worn alike with walking, traveling and handsome "dress" costumes, according to the quality and quantity of materials and garnitures which compose it. Popular and becoming toques of a beautiful shade of Russian blue or chestnut brown velvet have soft panne crowns that lie perfectly flat, the brims bordered with fur and as a trimming, an aigrette of fur tails rising from a pompon of soft brown ostrich tips.

In ordering patterns be sure to give size and number.

No. 2,471—LADY'S WAIST.

This charming waist is developed in polka-dotted satin foulard. The yoke is of antique lace over satin, and the belt and accessories are of panne velvet in a pronounced contrast. The pattern is cut in sizes 32 to 40 inch bust measure. Size 36 requires three and one-quarter yards of 21-inch, two and one-half yards of 32-inch, or one and three-quarter yards of 42-inch material. As shown, two yards 21-inch, with one-half yard of tucking, five-eighth yards of 21-inch for sleeve puffs, and two and one-quarter yards for trimming.

ENLARGEMENT OF MY QUEEN.

OUR readers will be pleased to learn that we will increase the size of MY QUEEN beginning with No. 31, issued next week. Several new departments and attractive features will be added to make MY QUEEN the most attractive publication of its class. A great big weekly for 5 cents. Don't fail to procure it.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BY GRACE SHIRLEY

NOTE.—This department is a special feature of this publication, and it will be appreciated, we feel sure, by all our readers. It is conducted by Miss Shirley, whose remarkable ability to answer all questions, no matter how delicate the import, is well known. Readers of "MY QUEEN" need not hesitate to write her on any subject. Miss Shirley will have their interests at heart and will never refuse her assistance or sympathy. As all letters are answered only through the columns of "MY QUEEN," it is unnecessary to enclose stamps.

So many letters are being received by Miss Shirley requiring answers in this department that we shall have to ask our correspondents to limit their letters to 200 words, in order that all may be answered. STREET & SMITH.

I am twenty-five years of age and have been keeping company with a young lady for about two years. To say that I love her is to use only a mild phrase, and she in return has shown a kind affection for me. She is the daughter of very rich people, and I am a law clerk and get only thirty dollars a month. Do you think I could provide for her, and would it be wise to ask her to be mine? ALEXANDER B.
Buffalo, N. Y.

We do not think that any man ought to ask a woman to marry him and intrust her entire future to his care unless he can provide her with a home and show some assurance that her future life will be at least comfortable. You cannot do this upon your income. Why do you not make your desires constitute an incentive to rise in your profession, so that you will win a position worthy of the woman you love?

I used to go to a good many dances and there was one gentleman I really liked, but he was only with me when we danced together. I have stopped going to these dances, and so has he, but he always speaks well of me to my friends and claims that I am his girl, but he does not come to see me. What shall I do about it? GUSSIE W.
Cleveland, O.

If you really desire to continue the gentleman's acquaintance, you might write him a brief note, saying that since you have not seen him at the dances which you both used to attend, you would be pleased to have him call upon you at your home some evening. It is possible that he does not feel at liberty to call without an invitation, and you can readily renew this pleasant acquaintance.

When I was away last summer I met a young man who has called to see me several times, but he does not show any signs of affection. Would you please let me know how I can gain his affection or do you think he cares for me and does not like to show it? VIOLET S.
Baltimore, Md.

Since the young man has shown no indications of affection, there is no reason to consider that he possesses any. He may like you in a purely friendly way. Good friendship is not to be despised, and we would not advise you to endeavor to turn it into love.

I am nineteen years old, and I am in love with a young man who returns my affection, but as he is not of the same religion as myself my parents object to my keeping company with him. Please advise me what to do, for it would break my heart to give him up. MADGE.
Buffalo, N. Y.

A difference in religion should count for no more than a difference in politics or nationality. Life and love are not made up of religion any more than a dinner is made up of salad and pickles. If your lover and yourself can settle the religious question between you and find a common ground which is mutually satisfactory, you will probably be able to secure the approval of your parents. Settle all such questions before you enter into any engagement, however, and take no chance of their causing dissension thereafter.

I am a young girl of eighteen and am deeply in love with a young gentleman, but he does not return my affection. Please advise me what to do in order to gain his affection, for I love him dearly.
Buffalo, N. Y. MAYSIE.

You have surely too much self-respect, Maysie, to desire to give your love where it is not returned. Be a woman and be strong. There is no charm that will gain the love of one who does not care for you. Some day the man will come along who really values and desires your love, and then you will be glad that you have not spent it where it was not reciprocated.

I am in love with a young man who calls at our house very often. He has been a friend of the family for the past twelve years and was a chum of my brother's. He comes now whether my brother is home or not, and my folks think he comes to see me, but I have little hope of that. He is very good and kind to me. Do you think he loves me, or are his attentions just friendly? H. W. S.
Paterson, N. J.

There would seem to be but little doubt that the young man comes to see you, and the natural conclusion is that he likes your society. His feelings may be wholly friendly ones, which will develop into something more affectionate, or they may continue upon a basis of friendly companionship. You will have to be the judge of this, as it is his actions while with you which will reveal the true position which you hold in his esteem. Do not discard his society, even if you become convinced that he is only a friend. A really good friend is a treasure.

My sister, Claribel, and myself are twin sisters, and both have lovers. Claribel's lover is very wealthy, while mine is poor. Mother is very unwilling to sanction my union with my lover, but is willing that my sister should have hers. I do not think I could give him up, and I consider him as much of a gentleman as the other. Do you think I do wrong to encourage him? ANABEL B.
A——, N. Y.

If your lover's prospects and capacity in business are such that you feel that he will never be able to marry you and provide for you, you do wrong to both him and yourself when you encourage him. Under such circumstances a deep attachment that cannot be satisfied will only lead to unhappiness and regret. On the other hand, if he is ambitious and energetic and you feel that he will make a success some day you will do well to give him the benefit of your sympathy. A man can have no stronger incentive to success than the encouragement and appreciation of the woman he loves.

I am eighteen years old and love a certain beautiful girl of this city. Some way she does not seem to return my love, although I have always been kind and loving to her. Can you advise me of any way in which I can gain her longed-for love? I am rather good-looking and I think she does not think badly of me, though she shows no particular love. I will watch for your answer in your most meritorious paper, "My Queen." ARCHIBALD H.
Grand Forks, N. D.

Kindly attention upon your part and a desire to please her in every way should win her love, if it is to be won. There is no other way to make a lady love you except by always showing her that preference for her company which is necessary to convince her of your regard. Do not bore her with your affection, but bestow it delicately. You are too young to think seriously upon the subject of love, so we advise you not to let your feelings overcome you in this matter.

I married my last husband three years ago, and I have never seen a happy moment since. He is one of the most disagreeable men you ever saw, and I can hardly endure him. I have two little boys, and the only comfort I have is with them. I really hate the man. Please tell me what to do. I am not able to go out and work hard. He manages to keep us from starving and that is about all. MRS. M. B.
Denver, Colo.

You have not told us why you hate your husband, excepting that you say he is disagreeable. Do you feel sure that the fault is all on his side? Our advice to you would be to think seriously over this matter and try to find out if you have been lacking in any way in your duty toward him. Then have a plain, frank talk with him, telling him how hard he is making it for you to get along with him, and that if there is no change in his manner, you will be forced to leave him. If you follow this advice and he still fails to treat you kindly, write us again, and we will tell you what to do.

Thinking that you will be able to help me out of a difficulty, I take the liberty of asking your opinion on this subject. About seven months ago I became acquainted with a young man who has since won my affections, and whom I have met several times. When I am with him he appears to think a great deal of me, but of late I do not see him very often. When I write him he does not answer, and when I see him (two or three weeks later) and ask an explanation he always says he has been out of the city and has just returned. Please tell me how I can be sure of his affection, as I do not want to give him up. MURIEL V.
Providence, R. I.

This young man does not value your affection very highly or he would show you more consideration. From what you write us he appears to be neglectful and not much interested in you. It would be folly to try and win the affection of a man like this. You would only waste your time and your love. Try and get over your attachment for him, since he is unworthy of it.

I am a girl seventeen years of age, and am very wealthy, but unhappy, as I have a stepmother who objects to me keeping company with the kind of boys I prefer. The other night I went to an old-fashioned country hoe down with one of them. When I returned she gave me a very hard whipping and says that I must quit running around with those boys or leave home never to return again. Now I wish your advice in this matter, whether you would leave home or keep company with boys that bear a better name than the ones I have been going with. PUSSY.
Toledo, Ill

Your stepmother seems to be a very practical woman and you would do well to follow her advice and avoid more whippings. It seems incredible that a girl of your age should have to be whipped into good company. Let us hear from you again, Pussy, after you have taken your stepmother's advice.

I am a boy of eighteen and am deeply in love with a married woman. She says she will leave her husband if I will marry her. What would you advise me to do? I.
Mt. Vernon, O.

We would advise you to break off your acquaintance with this woman at once. You have no right to the affection of another man's wife, and if she were a woman worthy of your respect, she would not have allowed you to cultivate any tender feeling for her. It will be time enough for you to think of marriage when you are able to support a wife and, when that time comes, we hope that you will not choose a woman who is already the wife of another man, but that your desires will be more honorable than they appear to be at present.

I have been reading "My Queen" every week for some time. Your letter department seemed very foolish at first, but now I have great respect for any one who can handle other people's troubles as well as you do. I am a young man of twenty. I cannot say that I am good-looking or that I know more than my parents. I have always been sent to school, but have a fair education and have stopped school and gone into a business that pays me about forty dollars a month. I have never gone with girls much because I took the advice of older people, and now the girls seem to think that I care nothing for them and treat me as they would a married man. Well, I won't push myself in! I treat all girls as superior beings, and doubt if I am good enough for them. On making new acquaintances I always wait for the girl to take the lead in conversation, with the result that I seldom ever converse. I have been the playmate from childhood of a girl two years older than myself. I find this old friendship is creating a love. We neither of us care much for society, but desire to stay at home. My parents know of all this and have no objections, except that she is older than myself and not of a very strong constitution. Please tell me what you think of my state of affairs and how I should proceed. I must add a word of praise for "My Queen." I predict a great future for it.
Maryville, Mo. W. R.

It is usually wisest for a man to choose a wife younger than himself, but the slight difference in your ages is not a very serious objection. We would advise you to wait a few years until your business brings you in a larger income and you have something laid by for the inevitable "rainy day" before you enter into any engagement. You will probably succeed better in women's society if you are more self-reliant and not so over-willing to "take a back seat." Women do not admire retiring and diffident men.

I am a young girl of sixteen and enjoy reading "My Queen." My father died when I was two years old, and my mother has never been married since. My mother objects to me going with young men, and she does not even let me go to parties nor with my girl friends and insists on my going to school. When I go any place my mother goes along. Do you advise me to let all parties, dances, theatres and young men alone? JULIA.
Kearney, Neb.

We think you are too young to think of going out much, and your mother is wise to discourage your going with young men. A girl of your age will do much better to spend her time with her books, preparing herself for a useful life, than if she allows her head to become filled with thoughts of parties and beaux.

I have all the troubles that afflict the just. I am a young girl, but eighteen years old, and think I am in love with two young men. I would like to ask you if one can really be in love with two people and love them each well enough to marry them, as I think I do. One of these young men I admire because he is so handsome, and I think the attraction with the other young man is his affectionate disposition. LOLA-MAY.
Lincoln, Neb.

No one can really be in love with two people at the same time, and love them well enough to marry them. The only love that should cause marriage is the love that confines itself to one individual, excluding all others. This is the only safe basis for married life. You probably like both of these young men in a friendly way, and your wisest course is to continue on a friendly basis and not be too anxious to consider whether you are in love.

I have been married three months to a man who was a good man until he met another man, who taught him to drink musty ale, and since then he stays with this other man all the time and always says he can't stop drinking. He never drank anything before. Do you think it is musty ale or something else that keeps him out, or shall I go and see the other man about it? I am great reader of "My Queen," so thought I would confide in you. He is a good man, only he will drink musty ale.
Buffalo, N. Y. MRS. T. B.

We should imagine that a daily beverage of "musty ale" would be quite sufficient to cause a man to wander from his own fireside, or, rather, having "wandered," to consume it. We can understand his not wishing to go back; he is probably too much ashamed to wish to face you. How to win a man

from "musty ale" is almost too much of a problem for Grace Shirley, but we presume that he can be won by appealing to his sense of honor and dignity. You could have the other man restrained from selling this beverage to your husband, but there is no way in the world to prevent his giving it to him. A plain talk with both of them may do some good. It is a pity that good women are so often forced to these humiliating positions.

I am a "grass widower" of sixty-three, but have become deeply in love with a girl of fifteen. She returns the love, but her parents object on account of my business, which is that of advance agent of a comedy company, with insurance as a side line. I am five feet three inches in height, and have white hair and mustache. Am considered handsome for an old man, and have enough to support her in good style. I am at loss what to do. I can't lose her, and she says she can't give up her "old white-haired darling." It would break my heart to give her up, and yet I hate to be eloping at my time of life. What would you do if you were in my place?

C——, Kansas. H. A. N. D.

If we were in your place we would try to be a man and not allow an immature girl of fifteen to even imagine herself in love. To ask a girl of that age to tie herself to a man of your years means to ruin the best years of a woman's life. How do you think this girl would enjoy nursing your decrepit old body when you are eighty years old and she is in the bloom of her womanhood? For shame!

I know a young man of thirty-two who is in love with a widow eight years his senior and asks my advice as to what he should do. The lady is wealthy and has three children, of whom the bachelor is very fond. She notably reciprocates the feeling of the gentleman in question. I would greatly prize your thoughts on this matter. Will you say your worst on the subject in the next number of your paper?

Peabody, Mass. X. Y. Z.

We consider that a man thirty-two years old ought to be able to manage his own love affairs without the assistance of his friends. If he is so uncertain of his real feelings, we would not advise him to marry any one, as he might be more uncertain after marriage than before.

I have been reading a few numbers of "My Queen" and am thoroughly convinced that, from the letters I have read, your counsel and advice are both healthy and sincere. I am a young lady of good reputation and considered very popular; have a number of friends and callers. I have talked on every subject that I could think would be entertaining, discussed books, science, music, sports, etc., till I am thoroughly exhausted, and now, as I wish to continue pleasant conversations without referring to idle gossip, I turn to you and implore you to suggest some new topic which would be entertaining and educational. GEORGIE.

Columbus, O.

You must already be a wonderful conversationalist if you have exhausted the subjects mentioned, but, perhaps, you mean that you have exhausted your knowledge of them. There are always interesting topics for conversation in the monthly magazines, and you have only to turn to your library for endless subjects. Among other things we would advise you to discuss the spelling book and dictionary, as we found several misspelled words in your letter; also a conversation upon punctuation would be highly instructive, if only you converse with some well-informed person.

I am a reader of your journal "My Queen," and would like to ask your kindly advice in a love affair so complicated that I fear you will scarcely know how to answer me.

I am a young lady of twenty and have received the attention of a young man of twenty. Some time ago there was a little estrangement between us and I began receiving the company of his brother twenty-two years old. The other brother leaving the city, I received a letter from him, and we renewed our friendship, while at the same time keeping the company of his brother. Both boys have become deeply in love with me, and before realizing what it was coming to I found I loved them both. They are both moral, industrious young men and have used me with such kindness and respect that I could not decide which was dearest to me. Neither knew of the attentions of the other until recently, and now a jealous feeling exists between the otherwise loving brothers. Both claim their lives will be a blank without me, and I love them both with a love tested and sincere enough to marry either. It is a state of affairs that no intelligent lady should allow herself to get into. But since that part is beyond recall, your advice as to what I should do will be greatly appreciated, and I am sure I will be benefited by it.

Cleveland, O. L. B.

As you say, you are to blame for this unfortunate condition of affairs, and so it is no more than right that you should end it. It is Grace Shirley's advice that you go away from these two young men and remain until you have decided which is dearest to you. When you have so decided, state your preference to them candidly; then, if they are manly fellows, they will accept what you offer them.

I am seventeen years old and have been going with a young man twenty years old for two years. He has told me he loved me, and I have returned it, and he has also taken the next step. Do you think it would right for us to marry at that age? I have a mother, but no father, and I work for a living. I don't think mother has any objections. When he sees me talking to my brother's friends he gets angry and tells me that he don't think that I think anything of him, but I do. Don't you think that is a sign of jealousy? I wish I was like Marion Marlowe. I am just in love with her. I also admire Mr. Ray. MAUDE D.

Chicago, Ill.

We think you are both too young to marry, and earnestly advise you to wait a year or two longer. While marriage is all right, it is by no means the only thing in life and we would advise you to look around a little before settling down to matrimony. Always remember that no girl is fit to marry until she has a good education and her habits are so developed that there will be no danger of her regretting the step she has taken.

I was looking through some papers the other day and found a copy of "My Queen," and liked it very much. I had been reading the Tip Top, but think your paper is much nicer for girls to read. One feature of your paper, that I liked very much was Questions and Answers. I was going with a fellow whom I loved and think that I was loved in return, but through an enemy that I once believed to be my friend there was a letter sent to him which he thought I had written, and it caused a quarrel. I have not been able to see him or to converse with him in any way; and as I am only seventeen and do not know the ways of the world myself, and have no one to go to, I come to you seeking advice, wishing to find out how I can let him know I did not write the letter, and to know whether he still cares for me or not.

F——, W. Va. VIOLET.

There seems to be nothing for you to do but write the young man a letter of explanation. You have always the right to vindicate yourself, so there is no impropriety in writing such a letter. We are glad to know that you enjoy "My Queen."

I have read several of your papers, and am very much interested in them, especially the Questions and Answers, but not any more so than I am in Miss Marion Marlowe. I only wish that I were as able to take care of myself as she is. But as you know that all girls were not, you have provided a way in which they can find out. About one year ago there was a young man going with me, whom I loved and he said that he loved me, and wanted to marry me, but circumstances would not permit me to then, but they have since changed. So he went away, and said that in the course of two years he would be back and then, if we continued to care for each other, we would be married. I do not know where he is, but thought I did once and wrote to him, but did not receive any answer. Do you think I ought to continue thinking of him or try to forget, and think of some one else? BIDDELIA.

F——, W. Va.

Wait patiently, Biddelia, and see if your lover comes back. When the time is up and he has not arrived, you can safely consider that he has ceased to care for you, but, if he does return, what happiness will be yours! We are sure that it will repay you for your weary waiting.

I am fifteen years old and am keeping company with a young man who lives in the same building. He is seventeen years old. I have been keeping company with him for four months. We are very fond of each other. We have had several quarrels and he has always been the one to make up. I teased him, and was real mean to him last week. He told my mother I would have to do the making up. Will you kindly adise me what to do in this matter?
Chicago, Ill. F. M. E.

There seems to be but one thing for you to do and that is to "make up." It is the proof of a very small nature not to admit when one is in the wrong. We advise you to stop quarreling at once. It is childish and very silly.

I hope you will give me some advice, because I will do just as you say, and I will be ever so thankful. I have been going with a young man whom I love better than life. I always thought he was a widower; everybody who knew him thought so too. But, to my great sorrow, I found out that his wife was living, and he was living with her, and that they had a very happy home. I have found it out when it was too late. I knew him nearly five years and never knew anything about his family until about a year ago. I have tried my very best to stay away from him, but I cannot. He is always very friendly when he sees me. I know it is a great wrong for me to be going with him. If you can't give me any good advice, I will end my life, as I don't care for anything or any one else in this world. BROKEN HEARTED.
Jersey City, N. J.

My dear child, your pathetic letter makes me very sorry for you, but I hope that you will listen to the advice which I now give you. It is true that you are in a very sad position, but, as you were deceived at the outset, you can hardly be blamed for what has happened. Try to control your love and force it to submit to your better judgment. You know that no good can come of loving a man who is bound to another, particularly a man who has basely deceived you. It is your duty to yourself to give him up, and it should be done at once and forever. We do not fear that you will end your life. You are probably far too sensible a girl to do any thing so idiotic.

I am in love with a young lady of eighteen years and am in doubt as to whether she loves me or not. I have spoken of my love to her and have asked her if she loves me also. She seems to avoid telling me, and changes the subject. I think she loves me, though, as there is a gentleman of about forty years that comes to see her and is quite rich, while I have to work for a living, and she prefers my company to his. If an opera comes along and he asks her to go with him she refuses and claims I have asked her previously, whether I have or not, and then attends with me. If she loves me, I do not know why she seems to avoid telling me so. I am an engineer and receive a monthly check of $120, and think I can afford to support a wife.
Republic, Wash. G. J. V.

I should think by your letter that you were a very worthy young man, and I have no doubt that the yound lady will love you in time, if she does not now. Give her plenty of time to think over your avowal, but, if she waits too long before answering, you might coax her a little. The salary which you receive ought to keep you in modest comfort.

Although I am not of the sex to gain admittance into the letter department, still I do not think you will lay my letter aside without answering. I am a young man of nineteen, who is deeply in love with a young girl of eighteen. Her parents do not object to her going out with me, as we are old friends of the family. Two or three weeks ago I asked Eva's father for her hand in marriage. He said we were entirely too young, but that if I would wait three or four years I would be welcome to her, providing that she loved me then as much as now.
I do not want to wait, as I am afraid Eva will be charmed with some one else then. I want to marry, and so does she. Please help us out of this fix or scrape, as you may call it. ELMER.
Philadelphia, Pa.

You do not seem to be over sure of your loved one's devotion. Do you not think it would be better to postpone your marriage until after the danger of her loving some one else is entirely passed, or do you wish such a thing to happen when you are tied together? Her father seems to be a sensible man, and you would both do well to follow his advice implicitly.

I want to ask you a question about my school life. I am fourteen years old and I am of a quiet disposition. My friends, who were so kind and friendly to me a short time ago, now don't take any notice, because they said there is no life in me and that I am afraid of the boys, etc. It is true that I have nothing to do with the boys, as mamma says I am entirely too young, but I am losing all of my friends, as they have just discovered that I am too slow. Do please advise me. NATALIE
Philadelphia, Pa.

I am delighted to hear of one fourteen-year-old girl who is "too slow." The majority of them are far "too rapid" for the editor of "My Queen!" Never mind about the "friends" who refuse to notice you, Natalie. You will be just as well off without their notice, and, some day, when they are wearied by their own fastness, they will be glad to come back to you. Just go on with your studies and be a nice, ladylike little girl and you will some day be a woman that your friends will all be proud of.

My heart is breaking. I am deeply in love with a young man. I leave this city, never to return again. I do not think the young man will have the courage to "pop" the question. Will you kindly suggest some way by which I could bring him to the point without losing maidenly dignity.
Please tell me as soon as you can, because I do not think I should live, if I go away without some settlement. LILLIAN S.
Washington, D. C.

My poor child, I am very sorry for you, but, as I do not know the young man's wishes, I hardly know how to help you. If he loves you, the knowledge that you are going away should make him declare his love, and if he has no affection for you there is no use in trying to force such an avowal. You can mention your departure when you see him again, and, if he says nothing, it will be pretty safe to conclude that the regard is not mutual. In that case, you must be brave and not do anything foolish. Remember, the world is full of worthy lovers, and, some day, your waiting will be rewarded.

Last winter I attended school where a young gentleman also attended. We were classmates together, and I only thought of him as a friend, and I think he did me the same, but this winter we again attend the same school. I feel more than a friendly feeling toward him, and I think he is also inclined that way. And as I am only fifteen and he is seventeen his mother thinks we are too young to go together. What advice could you give me on this subject? HELEN.
Kansas City, Kan.

We think you would both be much wiser if you pay close attention to your school and studies for a few years. You are too young to spend much time thinking about love. Have all the good friends you can, but do not allow them to cultivate any deeper feeling for you than friendship, and do not permit any deeper feeling to enter your own heart. Wait until you are old enough to judge men before you think about confining your attention to any one of them, and be sure that they are established in business and prepared for the struggle of life before you allow them to spend much time paying attention to yourself.

In reading "My Queen" I found it to be of inestimable value to every one in regard to love affairs or who is otherwise in distress. I am a girl of eighteen years, and do not have many male friends, as I am not over fond of them. About a month ago I was introduced to a gentleman and took a liking to him, as he seemed in every way an estimable person. At first he called very often, but for the past few weeks I have not seen him. He used to be very affectionate when I was in his company. The last time he called he asked me to go on a tandem bicycle ride with him, and I refused. He seemed very much dissatisfied, and left soon after. I never asked him to renew his calls. He always came of his own accord. I wish you would tell me what to do. Shall I apologize to him or drop his company?

VIOLET.

Boston, Mass.

There is no reason why you should apologize. He asked you to do what you did not care to do, and there was likewise no reason why he should feel offended. The man who becomes disgruntled at a matter of this sort must be very small-minded. We do not imagine that you have lost much in losing his acquaintance, and trust that the rest of your friends will prove less selfish.

If You Have Dyspepsia

Send no money, but write Dr. Shoop, Racine, Wis., Box 92, for six bottles of Dr. Shoop's Restorative; express paid. If cured, pay $5.50—if not, it is free.

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Has been used for over FIFTY YEARS by MILLIONS of MOTHERS for their CHILDREN WHILE TEETHING with PERFECT SUCCESS. It SOOTHES the CHILD, SOFTENS the GUMS, ALLAYS all PAIN. CURES WIND COLIC, and is the best remedy for DIARRHŒA; Sold by Druggists in every part of the world. Be sure and ask for "Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup," and take no other kind. Twenty-five cents a bottle.

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Paxtine is just what every woman needs when taking a vaginal douche, as it is the only preparation that is absolutely certain to thoroughly cleanse the passage of all injurious matter. It is an imperative necessity to keep in a condition of perfect cleanliness if a woman would enjoy health.

Paxtine is soothing, non-irritating, and has greater cleansing virtue than any antiseptic medication known to the profession, yet it is so harmless that it is recommended as a tooth and mouth wash, a corrector for bad breath, for nasal catarrh, sore throat, cuts, wounds, and general antiseptic use, for which purposes it has no superior. One month's treatment, 50 cts. At druggists, or by mail.

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Send name and address **no money**, and we will mail you 12 boxes of Comfort Cough Tablets. Will cure a cough in one day. Sell them for **10** cents a box. Send us the **$1.20** and we will mail you these two beautiful SOLID GOLD laid Rings. Will wear a lifetime. No money required till tablets are sold. We take back all not sold.

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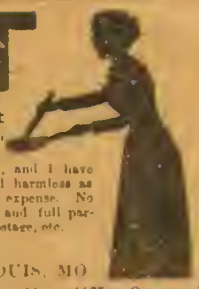
FAT

How to reduce it



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"For twenty long years my wife suffered untold tortures from **Sciatic Rheumatism** and **Neuralgia**, and I thank God for the day that your heaven-sent remedy fell into my hands, for it completely cured her. I am a minister of the gospel, and when I find any who suffer I cannot help but recommend '5-DROPS,' for I know it will do more than you claim for it."—*Rev. F. M. Cooper, Washington Center, Mo.*

The above testimonials are certainly proof that it is worth while to secure at once a trial bottle of this marvelous remedy. It is absolutely free. All you have to do is to write for it.

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A trial bottle will be mailed free of charge to every reader of this paper who is a sufferer from any of the above-named diseases. All that we ask you in return is that you take it as directed, and you will find it all that we claim. **It costs you nothing,** and you need feel under no obligations whatever in securing the trial treatment which we offer. Here is an opportunity to test a remedy without any expense to you. Certainly nothing can be fairer than this.

NOTE—Large size bottles (300 doses) will be sent prepaid to any address for $1,00. If it is not obtainable in your town, order from us direct.

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The crown of womanhood is maternity. Every healthy woman looks forward to marriage. Every wife looks forward to motherhood as the crown of wifehood. And yet there are many uncrowned queens; women who because the desire for children is unrealized feel that they have missed the full regal height of womanhood.

It is one of the sad features of a large bureau of medical correspondence such as is conducted by Dr. Pierce, of Buffalo, N. Y., that it has to deal so many times with the disappointed hopes of women who have failed of the happiness of maternity. But it is one of the glad privileges of this same medical correspondence bureau that in the greater number of such cases the obstacles to maternity are overcome by the establishment of the womanly health.

Not infrequently women write that they feel perfectly well and cannot understand why they are denied the maternal happiness which they desire. Such women learn that feeling well and being well are widely different matters. Few women are by nature debarred from the happiness of maternity. In the majority of cases Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription, supplemented by his free medical consultation by letter, are sufficient to establish the womanly health and remove the obstacles to maternity.

AN OPERATION AVOIDED.

"I had been a sufferer from uterine trouble for about three years, having two mishaps in that time, and the doctors that I consulted said that I would have to go through an operation before I could give birth to children," writes Mrs. Blanche E. Evans, of Parsons, Luzerne Co., Pa., Box 41. "When about to give up in despair I saw the advertisement of Dr. Pierce's medicine in the Wilkesbarre Record, and thought I would give it a trial as a last resort. I bought a bottle of Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription from the druggist, T. F. O'Donnell, of Parsons, and after taking it felt better than I had for years. Felt improved before I had taken one-half of the bottle. After I had taken four and a half bottles I gave birth to a bright baby girl who is now four months old, and has not had a day of sickness. She is as bright as can be. I cannot say too much in praise of Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription."

Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription is peculiarly and specifically a medicine for the cure of diseases peculiar to women. It will cure any disease which is curable by the use of medicine, and often cures diseases pronounced incurable by local physicians, or which they state are curable only by surgery.

"Favorite Prescription" establishes regularity, dries weakening drains, heals inflammation and ulceration and cures female weakness. It is the best preparative for motherhood; tranquilizing the nerves, encouraging the appetite and inducing refreshing sleep. It makes the baby's advent practically painless.

"For five years my wife was in an almost helpless condition, suffering from female weakness," writes J. B. Everritt, Esq., of Hagerman, Washington Co., Fla. "Last September I decided to try Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription. She took several bottles of the medicine and gave birth to a ten-pound son on January 31st, 1898. She is now sound and well, and doing her housework."

"I gladly recommend Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription," writes Mrs. J. W. G. Stephens, of Mila, Northumberland Co., Va. "Before my third little boy was born I took six bottles. He is the finest child, and has been from birth, and I suffered very much less than I ever did before. I unhesitatingly advise expectant mothers to use 'Favorite Prescription.'"

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Sick women, especially those suffering from disease in chronic form, are invited to consult Dr. Pierce, by letter, *free*. All correspondence is held in sacred secrecy and womanly confidences are guarded by the same strict professional privacy observed by Dr. Pierce in his personal consultations with sick women at the Invalids' Hotel and Surgical Institute, Buffalo, N. Y. Address Dr. R. V. Pierce, Buffalo, N. Y.

In a little over thirty years, Dr. Pierce, chief consulting physician to the Invalid's Hotel and Surgical Institute, Buffalo, N. Y., assisted by his staff of nearly a score of physicians, has treated and cured hundreds of thousands of weak and sick women.

Dr. Pierce's offer of *free* consultation by letter is not to be confused with misleading advertisements of "free medical advice" made by those who have neither the professional qualifications nor the legal right to practice medicine. Anyone can give advice on any subject. But the "medical advice" of a person who has no medical knowledge must be worthless and may be dangerous.

In consulting Dr. Pierce, women are addressing a physician whose skill as a specialist in the treatment and cure of diseases peculiar to their sex has given him a national reputation. There is no similar offer of free medical advice which offers advantages equal to those offered by Dr. Pierce.

Accept no substitute for "Favorite Prescription." The only motive for such substitution is to enable the dealer to make the little more profit paid by the sale of less meritorious medicines.

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Dr. Pierce's Common Sense Medical Adviser, containing over one thousand large pages and more than seven hundred illustrations, several of them lithographed in colors, is sent *free* on receipt of stamps to pay expense of mailing *only*.

This great medical work deals with subjects of vital interest to women. It treats of medicine, hygiene, and physiology, of the laws of reproduction and of biology in general. It teaches how to enjoy health and happiness in a long life. There is no charge for the book. Send 21 one-cent stamps (expense of mailing *only*), for the volume in cloth binding, or 21 stamps for the book in paper covers. Address Dr. R. V. Pierce, Buffalo, N. Y.

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Simply and surely because of its sterling worth. The reason no other medicine has even approached its success is plainly and positively because there is no other medicine so good for woman's ills.

REMEMBER

These important facts when you ask for a bottle of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound at your druggist's: If the clerk asks you to take "something else," telling you that it is "just as good" or "much better" — to be better, it must have cured *more* than 500,000 women; to be as good, it must have cured as many as 500,000 women — let him produce his proof! Such a thing is impossible. The medicine he offers you is only an experiment. All he knows about it is that he can make a little more profit on it than he can on what you want.

Don't let druggists experiment on you. Demand the medicine that you know is all right, that has no equal, that backs all its statements with positive proof. When you know that no other medicine in the world exclusively for women has received such unqualified endorsement, is it wise to let a dealer persuade you to buy something else which he says is "just as good," and all you have in proof is his say-so?

Wise is the woman who insists upon having

Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound